

# The Public Value of Anthropology: Engaging Critical Social Issues Through Ethnography

Edited by  
Elisabeth Tauber  
Dorothy Zinn

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# A Lively and Musing Discipline: The Public Contribution of Anthropology Through Education and Engagement

**Elisabeth Tauber – Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy**

**Dorothy Zinn – Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy**

Ich habe mich in die Lehre  
versenkt wie vielleicht sonst kaum jemand,  
damit die mir anvertrauten StudentInnen  
mit mir den Weg des  
neuartigen Erkennens der Welt gingen.

Perhaps more than almost anyone else,  
I have engrossed myself in my teaching  
in such a way that the students entrusted to me  
have traveled with me along a path  
to a new cognition of the world.

Claudia von Werlhof (2012, trans. by the authors)

## 1. Introduction

When we simultaneously started our positions in October 2011 at the Faculty of Education of a small and quite young university as the first full-time anthropologists on the staff, we quickly discovered that virtually none of our colleagues from other disciplines had a reasonably well-defined idea or sense of what social-cultural anthropology is all about. Although both of us have conducted our research exclusively in European countries, sometimes

even with some of the same populations or general issues that have been of interest to our non-anthropologist colleagues, it soon became clear that very few people around us had a clue as to the peculiar approach that we, as anthropologists, bring to our research and how we actually go about doing it.<sup>1</sup> We found this to be true even of many of scholars close to us who regularly employ qualitative research methods in their own work. For this reason, we decided to organize a first initiative of a lecture series with the idea of making social-cultural anthropology better known, to introduce a veritable culture of knowledge to students and colleagues from other disciplines. With a similar aim, we have subsequently developed this volume out of that initial effort, in order to make anthropological thinking and the construction of knowledge from ethnography accessible to other disciplines; at the same time, we have no doubt that the contributions presented here will offer insights for other anthropologists. But quite aside from trying to explain ourselves to our non-anthropologist colleagues, another fundamental goal we have in mind is that of reaching our students: despite a wide availability of introductory textbooks, we have assembled five studies that have a particular relevance for our students in social work, education and communications, all of whose programs have a strong focus on the local society.

We have asked our authors to present work based on their original ethnographic experiences, allowing the reader an insight into the ethnographic process and providing examples of a “thick” exploration of single social issues<sup>2</sup>. The idea of thickness is a core concern of anthropology: it means looking behind quick data, going beyond the surface. For us, this translates into bringing to light a deeper endowment of meaning in the study of social questions and capturing the dynamics of power in specific contexts. It is a culture of knowledge that takes insiders’ categories—what we anthropol-

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1 Our university’s trilingual instruction framework favors an encounter of German, Italian, and English-language academic traditions. For this reason, throughout the discussion that follows we will mention relevant features and examples of social-cultural anthropology by drawing from these three broad scholarly contexts.

2 It was Clifford Geertz’s landmark book *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) that popularized the notion of “thick description” as the ethnographic approach par excellence. Over forty years after its publication, this is arguably the best-known volume of anthropology among non-anthropologist scholars.

gists term “emic” perspectives—very seriously, and at the same time, it builds on a body of disciplinary work that has looked at humans across many different cultures.<sup>3</sup> We see this as a specific contribution we can add to reflections in other fellow disciplines that might be directly involved in working with people of various categories.

We should add a few words here about ethnography as anthropology’s primary methodology, a way of going about gathering and constructing scientific knowledge. In trying to address questions of how and why in social life, the anthropologist builds her knowledge together with the people with whom she is working as they share their own lives and knowledge with her. Ethnography means being with people, experiencing their lives together and getting close to them, attempting to capture emic forms of social knowledge that are often very implicit. Indeed, there are aspects of knowledge that people cannot or will not necessarily express if we simply ask them, and ethnography is quite often as slow as it is thick, taking the time to try to let such elements emerge. We should also keep in mind that, as canonized by Bronislaw Malinowski early in the twentieth century, ethnography is a scientific endeavor that seeks to respond to scientific questions. This distinguishes it from journalism or travel writing (one thinks of authors like Bruce Chatwin or Tiziano Terzani, or in the German-speaking world, Christoph Ransmayr), where the writer may have gained some insights, albeit valuable ones, by spending a period of time hanging out with some group of people. As a research methodology in social science, ethnography has indeed gained popularity in various disciplines outside of its original disciplinary base in anthropology. No matter who is performing it, ethnography is a means of gathering empirical data from which the scientist then works to build theory, and in this sense it features commonalities with the notion of “grounded theory.” Grounded theory has come into prominence since the late 1960s, but anthropologists were already doing ethnography in the nineteenth century, with the pioneering fieldwork of Louis Henry Morgan among the Iroquois,

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3 Drawing from the work of linguist Kenneth Pike (1947), anthropologists speak of “emic” and “etic” perspectives to capture a distinction that we can describe as insider (or subjective) versus outsider (or objective).

followed by Frank Cushing's work with the Zuni<sup>4</sup>. Even so, the anthropologist doing ethnography tends to emphasize certain features of the knowledge-building process that are not always shared by other people who carry out ethnography or other forms of qualitative research resembling it. First, engaging the emic perspective deeply and seriously also means taking on an awareness of the researcher's own position. This is what we refer to in anthropology as reflexivity. That is, it is fundamental to be aware that we as researchers are also human beings with our own perspectives, frameworks, categories and values, and these shape our perceptions and interpretations, often in subtle ways. Not to mention the fact that, whether we like it or not, we inevitably bring with us our own personal and group histories and a physical and social being that also shape our interaction with the people with whom we work, as they react to us. Especially if we are conducting our research in our own society, we need to be attuned to the possible risks of overestimating how much of our perspective is shared by those with whom we are working. But above and beyond this, we need to recognize that even what we might be shared between the researcher and the people studied is only one among the many human possibilities for experiencing, being and acting in the world. In this sense, unlike other social sciences, anthropology brings a comparative perspective to the study of cultures and societies (cf. Gingrich, 2013). Having a disciplinary tradition that has accumulated knowledge about human populations from around the world for about a century and a half, we have observed what is often recurrent, if not actually universal, in being human.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> But it was only really with Malinowski's work in the early twentieth century that ethnography developed certain conventions and gained widespread popularity.

<sup>5</sup> Anthropologists have a perspective that considers both what is culturally specific (the "ideographic") and what is universal (the "nomothetic").

## 2. The place of the discipline

Social-cultural anthropology has dealt with mankind from so many different angles and with such a variety of approaches that it is understandably difficult to get a handle on what exactly an anthropologist does. Certainly, in its early years the field was associated above all with research carried out in villages in Africa, Asia, and Oceania, or among native peoples in the Americas<sup>6</sup>. Nowadays anthropology goes everywhere where people are acting and making sense of these actions. If any human grouping is fair game for anthropological study, this of course multiplies the possible fields and questions for study to an infinite degree. An unavoidable consequence of the growth of any discipline is that we find some fragmentation, with scholars divided according to schools, research issues, geographic areas of specialization, theoretical orientations. With all of this riotous diversity, as anthropological insiders we somehow—and not without difficulty—identify a common thread in the discipline in its status as *the* science of culture. But if we ask many people in the general public or even within the university what their image of an anthropologist is, we may well expect that their replies would refer to (archaeologists) Indiana Jones or Lara Croft, with thrilling adventures in exotic places among wild natives: at least this would be a small step closer to the truth than the reply of others who would venture that an anthropologist studies dinosaurs, confusing us with paleontologists.<sup>7</sup> This is probably the case for most, but perhaps not all, national traditions of the discipline, despite all of the differences in their development.<sup>8</sup> The fact that anthropology is not widely taught as a discipline in the standard high school curricula in most countries adds to the aura of mystery and misperception among the general public.

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6 We mean “field” here as both the discipline, but also the place where anthropological research—fieldwork—is carried out.

7 Cf. Paredes (1999) for how anthropology is represented in media and not recognized by other disciplines.

8 On the struggle to make Ethnology understandable to non-specialized audience, cf. Klocke-Daffa, 2004. In Norway, however, anthropologists have succeeded in establishing themselves as well-known public intellectuals (cf. Eriksen, 2006; Howell, 2010).

The romanticized, stereotyped image of the khaki-clad anthropologist in the tropics among the naked (perhaps even cannibalistic) “savages” is clearly due in part to the legacy of a disciplinary history in which a certain academic division of labor arose in the nineteenth century. Especially through the ethnographic method, anthropology created tools for studying and understanding the seemingly strange actions and conceptions of Other peoples—that is, non-Western ones. The study of such Others thus had an obvious objective, but the idea of applying the same tools to studying us was not so self-evident, because our way of thinking and doing was taken for granted, as we were presumably developed, advanced and rational. This ethnocentric perspective—which we may well deem “Eurocentrism”—has constituted an obstacle to extending an anthropological approach to Western society itself. But this did not mean that Western populations were not themselves an object of investigation: that was what sociology was supposed to do. As the social sciences emerged, sociology took on the role of studying the so-called complex Western societies, while social-cultural anthropology as a field primarily studied non-Western peoples, especially those who were then under Western colonial domination.<sup>9</sup> Sociology arose as part of Auguste Comte’s post-Enlightenment project for studying ways to improve society in a period of rapid urbanization and industrialization in Europe and North America, with all of the social ills entailed in this transformation. Despite the fact that some anthropologists from very early on were actively promoting social critique and change in their own societies<sup>10</sup>, the most common image of social-cultural anthropology has primarily been related to the study of the bizarre customs and rituals of colorful, faraway peoples (whom many people of European descent would describe as “people of color”). As Anthony Paredes (1999) has commented:

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<sup>9</sup> We should note, however, that there have also been scholars—especially in the French tradition, such as Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, or more recent thinkers like Pierre Bourdieu—who have straddled these boundaries in their work and whose writings are fundamental reference points for both sociologists and anthropologists.

<sup>10</sup> In the U.S., for instance, Frank Cushing and Franz Boas criticized how Native Americans were treated. But activism in anthropology has not been uncontroversial: Alfred Kroeber advised his students not to become involved with governmental issues (Steward, 1973) and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1946) declared that any form of engagement would not be scientific (cf. Heinen, 1984, p. 79).

What we have to say is just too far removed from Western “indigenous knowledge systems” to be acceptable, unlike the more conventional forms of unconventional wisdom pouring out on the op-end pages from economists, historians, sociologists, humanity scholars, and other mainstream pundits on everything from the myth of the 1950s’ Ozzie and Harriett family to the cultural significance of Halloween. (Paredes, 1999, pp. 186f)

In the world of academic social science, then, anthropology has often seemed to take on a decorative role of adding color and spice<sup>11</sup>, and in this sense it may have appeared to be preoccupied with trivial or irrelevant questions and situations. Italian anthropologist Ernesto de Martino offers an exemplary comment on the seeming irrelevance of such research. Discussing Spencer and Gillen’s book on the Aranda of Australia, he writes: “[H]aving read the study, the Aranda themselves remain in the reader’s mind as a fortuitous humanity, a monstrous item of gossip in mankind’s history, whose ciphered strangeness does not compensate for their futility” (de Martino, 2005 [1961], p. 1).

It is true that much of the work of social-cultural anthropologists has been perceived by a wider public as purveying such “monstrous gossip” from one end of the global village—the one dominated by Western societies—to another, for the benefit of audiences in the West. Even so, as many scholars have pointed out, there has been a long tradition of anthropologists working “at home”, even in the early days of the discipline, and they have often aimed to improve society through their work<sup>12</sup>. At the same time, as anthropology developed in the Anglo-American tradition, power dynamics

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- 11 Michel-Rolph Trouillot has used the expression “the savage slot” in denouncing this view of anthropology’s role in human science (Trouillot, 1991).
- 12 It is true that the public role of anthropology has changed only since World War II: in the pre-War period, anthropologists invested their energy in a culture war that fought against ethnocentric supremacy and against biological determinism (the belief that people’s physical and mental features are shaped almost entirely by their genetic endowment; on the history of engagement in this direction, cf. Erikson, 2006). To cite only a very few examples here, de Martino himself was very taken up with North-South disparities within Italy and was also quite militant politically; in the U.S., Franz Boas was actively fighting racism in the early twentieth century, and Margaret Mead critiqued numerous aspects of U.S. society, including gender roles.

within the academy itself did not always allow for an adequate recognition of at-home research themes and engagement. Italian ethnology gradually grew out of both a colonial experience in East Africa and folkloristics at home, but the latter was not always oriented to addressing social conditions. Ernesto de Martino (1908–1965) was among the few twentieth-century ethnologists who actively addressed social problems in Italy, and much of his research dealt with the oppressive conditions of Southern Italian peasants; at the same time, however, he experienced extensive professional marginalization. Compared with the U.S., in Italy there is a much stronger tradition of academic intellectuals commenting publicly on social issues, but the voice of anthropologists is still relatively underrepresented.<sup>13</sup>

As for Germany, even if German ethnology has been inspired by Anglo-American public anthropology and the Scandinavian tradition (in particular Norway's) of “going public”, German ethnologists are still reluctant to share anthropological knowledge with the public for reasons that range from the experience of public misuses (Antweiler, 1998), to the analytical difficulty of cultural translations due to dualistic Western categorizations (Platenkamp, 2004). Another factor has been the division between academic ethnology and museum ethnology (Schlee, 2005), in which museums have been viewed as the ideal place where anthropological knowledge could be shared with a broader audience. Finally, the public presence of anthropological thinking in Germany is also related to the fact that the market for anthropological books (academic and popular science) is very small (cf. Schönuth, 2004, p. 88).<sup>14</sup>

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13 Among those Italian anthropologists with a more visible public presence and who are often called upon for comments on pressing social questions, we should mention Annamaria Rivera—a regular contributor to *MicroMega* and *Manifesto*—and Amalia Signorelli.

14 The German association ESE e.V. (*Ethnologie in Schule und Erwachsenenbildung*) has mainly focused on creating bridges from anthropology to school and adult education, adapting the Third-Culture Perspective developed by Gudykunst, Wiseman & Hammer, (1977) in the field of intercultural communication. The Third-Culture Perspective is an approach in which learners first gain knowledge about cultures which are distant from their own; they are trained interculturally to avoid an immediate reaction based on stereotypes and/or prejudices (Bertels, Baumann, Dinkel & Hellmann, 2004; cf. also Klocke-Daffa in this volume).

In recent decades and for a number of reasons<sup>15</sup>, more and more Western anthropologists are doing work in their own societies, thereby collectively transforming the discipline through their practice (Lamphere, 2004). Even if the Indiana Jones image still lingers, though, we can safely say that we are “exotic no more” as the title of Jeremy MacClancy’s excellent edited collection emphatically proclaims (MacClancy, 2002). Anthropology’s newly recognized relevance has attracted the attention of other disciplines within the academy, and in the university systems of many countries, social-cultural anthropology has played a minor but appreciated role for the contributions it can make to a very wide range of discussions. Quite often a non-anthropology degree program contains one or two anthropology courses as complementary side dishes to the main course of another discipline, and upon completing their university studies, many former students fondly remember the one anthropology course they took as a stimulating, quirky, insightful detour with little or no follow-up. In a widely-cited essay James Peacock, a former president of the American Anthropological Association, has called anthropology “the invisible discipline”: despite its role in serving undergraduate education, it has remained marginal within the university. He writes:

It is everywhere yet nowhere. Anthropology is nowhere because, unlike chemistry, literature, or history, it is still not recognized as one of the fields essential to

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15 Some of these reasons have been related to theoretical discussions and debates inside of anthropology. For a long time, doing anthropology at home was not considered as prestigious or legitimate as was working far away; in the minds of some scholars, it was not even held to be “real” anthropology. The change in anthropology since the 1980s, known as the “reflexive turn”, has also contributed to making it more legitimate for us to reflect on ourselves. At the same time, an increased awareness of power relations in culture and society and calls to study elite actors have also changed the perception of studying at home. For this reason, no one is too surprised today to find colleagues studying, for example, Wall Street (Ho, 2009). But structural conditions have also played a role: many countries that became independent from their former colonial rulers made access for research more difficult, while migration worldwide and globalization have increasingly made “otherness” a visible presence within Euro-American settings. Finally, the availability of funding for research has often impacted the choice of research settings and questions, and funding agencies in many Western countries are preferring to support research that has local applicability and usefulness.

the academy, and unlike economics, law, or medicine (or public health administration, social work, or library science), it is not known to be crucial to society. But anthropology is everywhere, implicitly and potentially, because of its scope. (Peacock, 1997, p. 10)

Peacock's observations regarding the U.S. context from some years ago resonate well with our own experience as social-cultural anthropologists in a small university that offers no degree program in anthropology. In just a few years, anthropology courses have gained popularity in virtually every degree program within the Education Faculty, and we are receiving more and more requests from other faculties for teaching and supervision of graduation thesis projects. These colleagues are also involving us as team members and consultants in research projects which are, however, fundamentally anchored in other disciplines. Our colleagues tell us that they appreciate our qualitative approach, in particular the ethnographic method, but they do not contemplate the use of a cross-cultural comparative perspective, nor are they interested in relativizing their own analytical categories.

### 3. Engaging critical social issues

Anthropologists are addressing critical social issues in their own societies in a number of ways: in the choice of their research themes; in the way they design and carry out their projects with research participants; in the courses they teach; in non-academic work they are performing in local communities, either professionally or on a volunteer basis; in how they make the messages developing out of their research known and accessible to different audiences (from smaller sites of diffusion to participating in conversations in the mass media). Over the last two decades in particular, there has been an increasingly palpable conversation in anthropology about the wide spectrum of activity being carried out that has been conjugated in numerous forms of advocacy, activism, policy shaping, collaboration, participation, and work for transformation in the communities researched and in society as a whole. These modes of action have received a variety of labels: from the established

and longer-standing tradition of applied anthropology, we read and hear more and more often about public anthropology, practicing anthropology, public interest anthropology, and engaged anthropology.

There have even been debates in the field in which numerous colleagues have argued the necessity of pushing the discipline even more strongly in this direction. In part, as Peacock has argued, wider structural changes in the academy are dictating a shift to research that is oriented to service (Peacock, 1997, p. 9). Additionally, with greater precariousness of the university job market in Euro-American countries, more and more people trained with M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in anthropology are finding work outside the academy in public institutions, NGOs and in other public-interest settings<sup>16</sup>. In advocating this shift, some colleagues have stressed ethical considerations: in their view, anthropology needs to have an “ethic of action” that goes beyond our standard ethical credo of “doing no harm” to the populations with whom we work (Rylko-Bauer, Singer & Van Willigen, 2006; cf. also Johnston, 2010 and Borofsky, 2011)<sup>17</sup>. Relatedly, the urgency of many questions of social justice has provoked some anthropologists to make their research more attuned to bringing about social change, and for many, this also has to do with making the nature of the research process itself more participatory and collaborative (Lamphere, 2004; Lassiter, 2005, 2008) or more directly aimed at policy making (Lamphere, 2003). Still other scholars have underlined the need to make the products of anthropological investi-

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16 Alongside such publicly-oriented positions, it should be noted that a number of people with anthropological training are also finding work in the private sector, be it for internal organizational dynamics, marketing or product development. Cf. Seiser, Czarnowski, Pinkl and Gingrich (2003).

17 Following a debate over the use of anthropological work in the U.S. government’s efforts during the Vietnam War, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) issued a Statement on Ethics in 1971. This statement has subsequently undergone a series of revisions (all versions are currently available on the AAA website). In the United Kingdom, the Association of Social Anthropology (ASA) has its own ethics guidelines. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde (DGV) in Germany worked out its own guidelines much later, including cautions about the use of anthropological work for marketing or military aims, but also the awareness of the sensitive issue of bridging research knowledge to non-specialized contexts. Professional anthropological associations in Italy have a much more recent history than in German- and English-speaking countries, but both the Associazione Italiana per le Scienze Etno-Antropologiche (AISEA) and the Associazione Nazionale Universitaria di Antropologi Culturali (ANUAC) have developed deontological codes, available through their respective websites.

gation accessible and available to ever greater numbers of people, thereby increasing the visibility of anthropological contributions to social issues (Borofsky, 2000; Checker, 2009; Checker, Vine & Wali, 2010): the accent here is on anthropology's audience (Jaarsma, 2005).

Within this overall trend, the current major players are anthropologists who identify themselves under the rubric of applied anthropology, and others who instead describe what they are doing as public anthropology. Applied anthropology embraces several domains, prominent among these being health and medicine, social services, education, museums, international development and cooperation, legal issues, the environment, and disaster relief. In the U.S., applied anthropology has an established history, and in some universities it has gained prominent institutional standing, constituting a fifth sub-discipline<sup>18</sup>. In Germany, Antweiler (1998) and Schönuth (2002) differentiate between applied anthropology—one based on academic research, *aus der Akademie heraus tätig werden*—and practicing anthropology oriented toward problem-solving (*problemösungsorientiert*), in which ethnologists work as freelance consultants. Although Italy has a strong tradition of medical and museum anthropology, as well as a number of colleagues who have focused on development and education, only recently has a group of anthropologists come together to form an association dealing specifically with applied anthropology<sup>19</sup>.

Public anthropology certainly operates in some of the same arenas as applied anthropology. One of its main promoters, Robert Borofsky, has insisted that cultural anthropology has a tremendous transformative potential, and a greater public presence can help to realize this potential: public anthropology not only addresses great social issues of the day, but also fosters broad-based public discussions that actively seek to promote social change. According to Borofsky, public anthropology differs from applied anthropology in its emphasis on trans-

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18 Anthropology in U.S. universities has traditionally been characterized by what is known as the “four-field” approach, where departments include anthropologists working in the sub-disciplines of social-cultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, physical (or biological) anthropology, and archaeology.

19 The Società Italiana di Antropologia Applicata (SIAA) was founded in December 2013.

parency, in terms of public accountability of the research conducted, as well as in its concern with big-picture understandings:

[P]ublic anthropology is concerned with understanding the hegemonic structures that frame and restrict solutions to problems as a way of more effectively addressing these problems. Hegemonic structures are not perceived as secondary, intellectual digressions that take one away from addressing a problem. They are seen as central to addressing it.<sup>20</sup>

To be honest—and perhaps even run the risk of airing some disciplinary dirty laundry—some of the discussion regarding the distinctions between public and applied anthropology has appeared to be a device for staking out professional turfs. In the dualism between the two that has developed, some anthropologists who have identified their work with the long-standing tradition of applied anthropology seem to take umbrage at the pretenses of inventing a new category of public anthropology; they argue that this is actually what they have been doing all along (cf. Singer, 2000<sup>21</sup>). On the other hand, others like Trevor Purcell have instead suggested that public anthropology has a critical edge lacking in applied work; in Purcell's view, although applied anthropology is praxis oriented, we should not assume that this practice necessarily translates into progressive action (Purcell, 2000, p. 32). It is fair to observe, however, that a number of anthropologists who self-identify with one side or the other (or even both sides) of this dualism have also argued for an inclusive stance. Foremost among these has been Louise Lamphere (2003, 2004), who is a past president of the American Anthropological Association, but Hans Baer has also spoken inclusively of public, applied and practicing anthropology under the heading of an “engaged” anthropology, because it “...entails a critical engagement with issues of the day” (2012, p. 217). In any case, there is not a shared understanding of

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20 <http://www.publicanthropology.org/public-anthropology/> [last access 22.03.2015]. For a critical reflection on Borofsky's work, see Vine (2011).

21 See also Borofsky's response published on the Center for a Public Anthropology website: <http://www.publicanthropology.org/public-anthropology/> [last access 22.03.2015]

engagement, and it is worth noting that there are anthropologists who are not engaging.

Wherever one stands on the question, the applied/public anthropology dualism softens somewhat when it is placed—like a nesting doll—with another, overarching dualism: that of a “practicing/applied/public/engaged” anthropology versus an “academic” anthropology. Here we see caricatures on both sides: members of the former camp are viewed as overly politicized and/or a-theoretical, oversimplifying what they study, beholden to their commissioning employers; the latter are instead pedantic, irrelevant academics barricaded in their Ivory Towers, publishing cryptic gibberish that only they themselves can understand. Such images are, in part, related to a certain real devaluation and marginalization of applied, public and practicing anthropology that has long held sway in the academic world (cf. Borofsky, 2011) in the U.S., Italy and Germany. The division seems to rest on other dichotomies: those of practice/praxis versus theory, and active versus passive. Catherine Bestman (2013), for example, maintains a restrictive definition of engaged anthropology: she argues against using the label of “engaged” for any ethnography simply because it deals with contemporary social issues. In her view, engagement rests on collaborative work toward social transformation. Similarly, in their introduction to an edited volume on engaged anthropology, Beck and Maida (2013) describe different forms of engagement, emphasizing the need to “participate in generating and bringing about change. We must be engaged in protecting the most vulnerable from oppression and exploitation and support the empowerment of communities to improve people’s lives.”

A laudable intention, indeed, but some commentators have expressed their doubts about being able to trace such a black-and-white picture in all contexts: Clarke (2010), for example, has pointed out the complexity of designating some communities/populations as the “oppressed” and “exploited”, when at times they themselves become the oppressors. Analogously, Herzfeld notes the following:

Stakeholders, bureaucrats, politicians, even speculators—all have their points of view. To try to capture the entirety of this complicated mixture as a reified “culture” or to summarize an appropriate response in terms of a fixed ethical code merely occludes the all-important detail through which we can begin to understand the situation as a process and a dynamic. (Herzfeld, 2010, p. 265)

If in previous decades the theory/practice divide was used by some academic anthropologists to degrade the status of applied/practicing forms of anthropology by arguing that it was not sufficiently based in theory, today it seems that we are seeing the opposite usage: a somewhat holier-than-thou attitude places praxis on the side of “active” (assumed to be positive), relegating theory to the devalued side of “passive” and associating it with academic anthropology. Yet a number of anthropologists, in urging the discipline to make itself more publicly relevant, have argued for promoting the integration of theory and practice in anthropological work (for example, Peacock, 1997; Borofsky, 2000). Norma González has gone a step further, most eloquently making the case that this is a false binary: she outlines how the anthropology of education, in a decades-long tradition, has united theory and practice, with both elements feeding productively and critically into one another (González, 2010). In any case we agree with Schönuth, when he writes: “The prerequisite for being engaged, however, is that ethnologists get to know local knowledge sufficiently well through their own research, in order to act competently in their intervention (Schönuth, 2002, pp. 2f).”<sup>22</sup> While Schönuth refers to anthropology within the field of development, we are convinced that being competent through one’s own research is true for any form of anthropological engagement.

As guest editors of an important supplement to *Current Anthropology*, Setha Low and Sally Merry have insisted on a very inclusive definition of engagement (Low & Merry, 2010). So inclusive, in fact, that in his comment Merrill Singer raises an eyebrow and asks whether or not they were casting their net too widely. Yet even Singer’s own perspective on engagement does

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22 “Voraussetzung dafür ist allerdings, dass die EthnologIn durch eigene Forschung genügend vom lokalen Wissen weiß, um kompetent an den Schnittstellen zu agieren.” (trans. by the authors)

not seem too prescriptive, where he cites “revealing, critiquing and confronting the unjust use of power” as the most salient features of engaged anthropology (Low & Merry, 2010, pp. 220–221). This is not so far from what Eric Wolf advocated over a decade earlier in his essay in *Transforming Academia*, when he wrote, “We need to be bolder about expanding and asserting anthropology’s capacity for the analysis of power, and bring it to bear on both the theoretical issues and societal challenges before us” (Wolf, 1999, p. 37). We find ourselves in agreement with Luke Erik Lassiter, who cuts to the quick when he writes:

Simply put, rather than worrying about which side of the argument on which you fall, or more precisely, rigidly demarcating what you do as applied, public, practicing or academic anthropology, students should be charting, as anthropologists, how best to connect with the central questions and problems of a larger anthropological project. (Lassiter, 2008, p. 73)

In this sense, we are opposed to overdrawing the distinction between “academic” and “public”.

Moving beyond the disciplinary *querelles*, no matter what way we choose to categorize the ethnographic works presented here, they all draw upon the strengths of an anthropological approach and ethnographic methods. Among these strengths, we would like to draw attention to how these works connect macro and micro levels of analysis: looking at situations up-close, but considering them holistically and in context. Additionally, anthropology’s gaze de-naturalizes social phenomena, especially through cross-cultural comparison, which can be particularly useful in framing social issues. In this regard, Borofsky notes that “Rather than being drawn into other people’s framings, public anthropology challenges the framings that support particular definitions of a problem.” (Borofsky, 2000, p. 9)

Louise Lamphere has described the anthropological contribution as follows:

Anthropologists are uniquely suited to addressing these topics from a distinctive angle. Our qualitative methodologies and field research give us “on the ground insights”. We know local languages and cultures, yet have a grasp of the larger political and economic forces that shape local situations. And we are able to unco-

ver interactional processes within organizations and identify unintended consequences of policies that quantitative research does not reveal. (Lamphere, 2003, p. 167)

Furthermore, she points out how anthropology gives voice to its subjects. This has been both a methodological and ethical imperative in our discipline, and it is also connected to a tradition of sensitivity to relations of power. For this reason, anthropology is particularly valuable in addressing critical social questions. Thus, as Trevor Purcell suggests, the discipline can play a transformative role by making “misrecognizable forms of the real division of the social order transparent” (Purcell, 2000, p. 33).

#### 4. Blurred boundaries in the anthropologist's engagement

The university setting in its narrowest sense—our students and our colleagues from anthropology and other disciplines—is one of our first and most crucial audiences, although not the only one. Several contributions in *Transforming Academia: Challenges and Opportunities for an Engaged Anthropology* (Basch, Wood Saunders, Scharff & Peacock, 1999) discuss important opportunities for engagement through our teaching. Brian Ferguson notes in his review of the book that this is a crucial aspect of anthropology's “public face”:

As my colleague Anne-Marie Cantwell pointed out to me, “our greatest contact with the real world is in our teaching... .” If we are to make an impact, if we want to survive, we must pay more attention to this foundation. (Ferguson, 2003, p. 866; cf. Forman, 1993)

And even within the academic world, one cannot assume that anthropology's voice is being heard effectively. This is particularly true in Italy, where anthropology is a marginal discipline and a number of academics from other disciplines (especially sociology) use our hallmark ethnographic research method. In this sense, we are producing this book as a public effort even within the academy itself. Furthermore, many of our students are preparing

to enter professions (school, communications, social work and the social sector more generally) or are already in the working world, where issues such as those discussed in this volume are directly relevant. We should not take for granted the fact that one of our first publics—that of our students—can act as multipliers of anthropologically-informed messages. Indeed, Judith Shapiro (1999) has emphasized the paramount importance of our teaching for overcoming the “social science illiteracy”, as she puts it that ruefully underlies much public debate on social issues.

A fundamental basis for any engagement, in any case, is a critical anthropology (deconstruction of race, religion and ritual, gender/feminism, childhood studies, kinship/descent, family, nation-state, policy). In some cases this may take on policy-relevant connotations; in others, it may simply be publicly relevant—making people think differently—and open up possibilities for transformative action. As Michael Herzfeld has written:

The task before us is both clear and urgent. It is to make such complexities accessible and interesting to multiple publics at a time when they are being cynically targeted for the seductive and perhaps irreversible addiction of false simplicities.  
(Herzfeld, 2010, p. 267)<sup>23</sup>

The works we are presenting in this volume are all critical analyses with implications for globalized social reality: the complex and often unintended effects of policies and procedures dealing with refugees and asylum seekers (Sorgoni, Weissensteiner); approaches in communicating and educating about faraway “others” who are also increasingly turning up at home (Klocke-Daffa), or who are others whom we think we know well, as in the case of the Gypsies, a perennial object of scandal in media representations and moral panics—not to mention the alarming rise of antiziganism in con-

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23 Not everyone is comfortable with such a mirror being held up, and we run the risk of becoming, as Paredes (1999) puts it, “the skunk at the garden party”: “When anthropologists break out of relativistic, emically based molds used to look at our own society’s institutions, we run the risk of angering the natives, so to speak, or at best of being ignored” (Paredes, 1999, p. 186). Similar concerns have been expressed by Erikson (2006), who contemplates the possibility that there is no interest in the type of knowledge that is produced.

temporary Europe (Tesăr)<sup>24</sup>; consumption practices with the aim of addressing social injustice across the globe (Henrici).

The arrival of people on the southern shores of Europe, people who are fleeing their homelands in droves for various reasons, has captured the attention of the European media in recent years, either to alarm the public about “invasions” of undesired Others, or slightly more sympathetically, when the Mediterranean Sea ends up as an unwitting cemetery for unlucky boat crossings. Using ethnographic work in northeastern Italy as a basis for her analysis, Barbara Sorgoni deals in her chapter with asylum seekers and the institutional procedures for handling their applications and accommodating their presence. She uses ethnography to point to unspoken assumptions and expectations on both sides of the relationship—paying attention to the asylum seekers’ point of view as well as that of social workers and other front-line operators—and giving us critical insight into how asylum policy gets implemented through various agents and how the social welfare institution of asylum seeker reception operates. Although many kindly and well-meaning social workers are involved in such a process, the anthropological thickness of the research allows us to grasp the underlying paradigms that are taken for granted in their work, leading to unintended effects in their interaction with their “clients”: Sorgoni raises questions of power and inequality in the hidden dimensions of asylum procedure and reception, and the anthropological holism of her approach allows her to draw connections between the legal aspects of asylum procedure and the social-welfare ones. Barbara has taken her anthropological work out of a strictly academic arena in order to help develop sounder policies and practices. She is a member of association Asilo in Europa ([www.asiloineuropa.it](http://www.asiloineuropa.it)), which aims at analyzing asylum norms and legal practices in Europe, promoting and disseminating the results of research on asylum rights, and fostering the creation of networks among asylum organizations throughout Europe in order to share information and good practices.

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<sup>24</sup> The term antiziganism refers to forms of hostility and prejudice against Romany (Gypsy) populations.

Encountering people begging for money in the street is an everyday life experience in most European cities and towns, and among these beggars we often find people from Romani (Gypsy) populations. Our image of Gypsies is also formed by the reproduction of negative stereotypes we constantly receive from the mass media. Cătălina Tesăr's contribution on begging among Cortorari Gypsies offers us a surprisingly different picture by situating the practice of begging within wider social and economic practices of the Cortorari people, with whom she did ethnography in Romania. Through her cultural translation of such economic practices, we are allowed to better understand what begging actually means to the Cortorari: the very intense nature of Tesăr's research helps us to recognize the dimension of work in begging, as paradoxical as it may at first seem to us. The in-depth ethnographic view we find here helps to transform stereotypes of Europe's most stigmatized group and break down an important "us/them" barrier. To understand how this ethnic group survives—and this is no small issue of social justice—Tesăr's holistic perspective takes a broader view of transformations in Cortorari means of making a living and sees how this gets worked into a concept of begging and transnational circulation through migration to Italy.

Cătălina has provided us with an intimate and powerful statement of the relationship of her academic work to public engagement, and we cite what she wrote to us for our reflection:

As an anthropologist working with Romani people on topics which are sensitive for the larger public (such as early age marriages, begging or the display of wealth), I have always felt uneasy about finding the most adequate voice to communicate my findings. There is a twofold trap in which one can be caught. On the one hand, one may involuntarily provoke moral harm to the people of one's research, by exhibiting their intimate life. On the other hand one continuously runs the risk of reinforcing rather than shattering stereotypes. Unless one falls into the former trap, one avoids falling into the latter. I confess that most of my attempts to speak about Romani philosophy of life, even if in the most sympathetic tone, were unsettling. The commentaries I received to articles published in the Romanian press, and to a lesser degree, those received from students whom I taught in a

Romanian University, were rather skeptical of my convictions that Gypsies are our equals and should receive an equally humane treatment. There are however at least two stories I like to tell, which keeps alive my conviction that the voice of anthropologist should be heard in the public space, and might contribute to changing prejudiced perceptions.

My father is a rigid retired military man. When he learned that I would be doing fieldwork among Gypsies, not only was he afraid that they would harm me one way or another, but he also found it debasing for him to converse with the people among whom I was to live for the coming two years. During the repeated visits my parents made me in the field, I could witness my father's changing expression when shaking hands with the Gypsy men: from reluctant in the beginning, to whole hearted in the final stages of my research. Later, on several occasions, I eavesdropped on conversations my father had entered into with his acquaintances, in which he stood up for the Gypsies as being trustful, friendly and reliable.

My second story is about the incentives and encouragement to share my knowledge about Gypsies that I received from Gypsies themselves. I once delivered a talk on begging in a conference in Romania. I was completely unaware that there were several journalists in the room, attending the conference. The next day, one of them released an article based on my presentation. The article went soon viral and was inevitably read by several of my Gypsies acquaintances, among whom I was still doing fieldwork at that time. A Gypsy friend inquisitively approached me: "You wrote about us in the news." Being afraid that he found the press article offensive, I faltered as I was explaining that I did not expect the mass media to source knowledge that was circulated at an academic meeting. Yet my friend enthusiastically consoled me: "You have gained a deep understanding of us, Cătălina. I am happy that you tell the world the truth about us." On other occasions, when the Romanian television cars arrived in the village of my research to report on different aspects of Gypsy culture, my Gypsy acquaintances agreed that I should speak on behalf of them in front of the camera. Experiences such as these have raised my awareness about the debt I owe as an anthropologist to the people of my study, to translate their culture into lay language and impart it to the public. (Cătălina Tesăr, personal communication 07.03.2015)

More and more often today, we find ourselves called to develop an awareness in our daily lives of how our consumption practices have repercussions across the global village, and one of the responses that has developed has been the burgeoning fair trade sector. In her chapter, Jane Henrici draws on over twenty years of ethnographic experience with artisans in Peru to critically investigate fair trade tourism and help move us toward a deeper consideration of such labels. Her work among Peruvian artisans who produce crafts for fair trade tourism—men and women of different ethnic backgrounds and social standings—demonstrates the need to think about complexities of consumption that are not very evident on the surface or from the buyers' end of the commodity chain. Henrici's contribution has implications for development, where projects and processes with excellent intentions may unevenly affect local populations with regard to social justice. Her ethnographic examples make it clear that we need to attend to how multiple axes of difference within groups that come together through the phenomenon of intersectionality: gender, ethnic and racialized categories, social class<sup>25</sup>. Central to her analysis is an attention to how power enters into the picture, often in unexpected ways.

Jane wrote a comment to us on how she views her own engagement, and it is striking how she notes that the lines between the various spheres of her activity as a researcher, an instructor and a concerned citizen are all but hard and fast:

As an anthropologist working in a variety of the world's regions, I often have worked with professionals of different disciplines and approaches. I have found anthropology to be distinct in the level of its emphasis on seeking the perspective of a society or group from within it, as well as from outside of it. In my view, engaged anthropology then strives to take that emic emphasis further with two principal features. One feature of the anthropology I regard as engaged is that it simultaneously studies people and their concerns while attempting to use research to respond to those. Another feature of engaged anthropology is that, despite its

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<sup>25</sup> Intersectionality also includes lines of difference such as disability and sexual orientation, though these are not present in Henrici's paper.

distinctions, it also has commonalities with other disciplines and approaches and indeed encourages boundaries to blur: among projects done for a salary or fee and those that are unpaid, the mentoring and teaching done inside and outside of the classroom, the efforts made to support political and civic activities and advocacy, and the sharing of research and information across a range of platforms. My own work is focused on gender, race/ethnicity, and economic hardship and has thus far sought ways to respond to challenges people find to their resources, rights, and opportunities as well as to the health and sustenance of their families; moreover, these efforts continue to converge whether they are public, civic, scholarly, educational, or contract activities. (Jane Henrici, personal communication 07.03.2015)

As mentioned above, a number of anthropologists today have been calling on colleagues to more boldly face the challenge of bringing anthropological knowledge to the public. While there are certainly various arenas for doing this—for example, by appearing in the news media, through blogging, by performing consulting and advocacy outside of the academy—museums remain a key site for communicating with non-anthropological audiences. In this sense, the chapter by Sabine Klocke-Daffa gives us a behind-the-scenes glimpse of what it takes to translate anthropological knowledge into accessible contents and messages. She presents a project that demonstrates the challenges of communicating and educating a young audience about the seemingly strange customs of other people. Through this concrete example of “anthropology in practice”, Klocke-Daffa demonstrates how we can bring about intercultural learning.

Sabine’s personal perspective on engagement dissolves the rigid distinction between theory and practice, and she sees a potential for public outreach as a means of increasing social responsibility and intercultural sensitivity in a globalized world. The paths for this are manifold, as she noted to us in a written statement:

It can be achieved in many different ways: inside academia or in anthropological practice without academic affiliation, in public institutions, private businesses or in freelance activities. My own way led me through most of these fields: I started out as a member of the nonprofit organization “Anthropology in Schools and

Adult Education" teaching school kids, giving talks to women's clubs, business organizations and friendly societies. As a University lecturer I was more on the teaching side but then started cooperating with migrant organizations and humanitarian aid institutions as well as organizing exhibitions and publishing for a broader public. It all merged into the New Applied Anthropology at Tuebingen University, which was initiated in 2014 as one of the major fields of action of the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology. Today, our students are working in many professions such as school teachers, intercultural trainers, development consultants and welfare workers among war refugees. (Klocke-Daffa, personal communication 20.03.2015)

Like Barbara Sorgoni's piece, Monika Weissensteiner's chapter also deals with asylum seekers and refugees, but here the focus is on issues that are fall within an intersection of medical and legal anthropology. Based on ethnographic research conducted in multiple settings in different countries, Weissensteiner moves between micro and macro levels of analysis to offer a critical deconstruction of categories and policy practices that converge to define the "worthy" asylum seeker as one who can demonstrate having been tortured. Her approach is one we may well find unsettling, but it is much needed for practitioners involved in asylum procedures (psychologists, doctors, social workers, legal staff). Like Sorgoni's chapter, Weissensteiner lays out some of the dilemmas that practitioners face, and her analysis has important implications for the medical arena, which tends to take for granted its own categories, such as "trauma" and "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder". She describes how the medical discourse intertwines with the legal sphere, where power operates to the detriment of many oppressed people.

In the reflections she sent to us, Monika mentioned her work in youth education in formal and informal settings, where she has dealt with issues of globalization, migration, human rights, refugees, (non-)violence, and conflict. With adults, she has taught professionals in the public health care sector and social workers, focusing on intercultural competencies, medical anthropology and migration. Currently she is expressing active engagement through her work monitoring the Italian-Austrian border, where asylum

seekers headed north are being turned back: in this context, she is interacting with refugees, police forces and activists, and she is conducting transnational networking and advocacy on this situation. Monika describes her work as “an entanglement between training as an anthropologist and various forms of engagement”:

I would mention on one hand [my activities in] youth and adult education, since I think education is a form of engagement, and on the other hand more directly related to the refugee topic my recent activities on the [Italian-Austrian] border, where the however always present “anthropologist in me” always tries to enter in relation with all actors, to understand the (power) dynamics and to catch their experiences and points of view. (Monika Weissensteiner, personal communication 15.03.2015)

All of the themes touched on in these contributions are themes that concern the lives of many professionals (social work, journalism, psychology, medicine, law, education). As we have seen, they are also themes that touch our everyday lives, and the work we find here connects broader macro-level forces of globalized interconnection with a fine-grained attention to micro-level interactions. They all call into question our ordinary generalizations and categorizations of social phenomenon, deconstructing everyday “certainties” through ethnographic insight. The five contributions draw our attention to how relations of power get played out; they all share a concern with issues of social justice. If we are to address these issues with the aim at finding solutions, we should bear in mind that—whether we like it or not—the social reality that anthropology observes is anything but amenable to simplistic diagnoses and cures. And in a truly panoramic view of engagement, this means remaining critically vigilant with regard to how scientific knowledge gets constructed and transmitted, inside as well as outside the academic community.

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# **Anthropology and Asylum Procedures and Policies in Italy**

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## **Abstract**

Traditionally a phenomenon concentrated in the global South, asylum is increasingly becoming a political and social issue also in the North. In the late 1990s the EU started to set up a common European asylum system of rules on the recognition of refugees and the content of refugee status, a process which has been extensively analysed from political and legal approaches. This chapter focuses on the ethnographic study of local institutions and association in charge with asylum procedures and with practices of asylum seekers' reception and status determination, in a northeastern Italian region. Adopting a comparative perspective, it shows how an anthropological approach can differently contribute to an understanding of those issues, allowing to uncover crucial dimensions of the institutional relations between decision makers, social workers and asylum seekers, which eventually contribute to determine the outcome of the application.

## **1. The wider context**

As in most countries in Europe, in Italy refugee status is primarily granted under the 1951 Refugee Convention, and increasingly under the new EU asylum legislation. The 1951 Geneva Convention Relating on the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (Article 1A[2]). Additionally Article 33(1) is important, affirming the principle of non-refoulement: "No Contracting State shall expel or return ('refouler') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the

frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion".

The Geneva Convention still forms the basis of international refugee law, governing a phenomenon traditionally concentrated in the global South where about 4/5 of over 15 million world refugees are located (Unhcr, 2010). But in the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War and the outbreak of war in former Yugoslavia and later in Kosovo, large numbers of refugees started to seek asylum in other countries and metropolises in the North. In the same period, following the European Union objective to define a common policy on asylum, a European asylum system was initiated with the aim to ensure not only that member states apply common criteria for the identification of persons in need of international protection, but also that a minimum level of benefits would be made available to these persons in all member states. Two main steps in this process of harmonization of rules on the recognition of refugees and the content of refugee status, are Council Qualification Directive 2004/83/EC and Council Procedure Directive 2005/85/EC, which also complement the above rules with measures on subsidiary forms of protection. The two Council Directives were adopted in Italy in 2007 and 2008 respectively<sup>1</sup>.

In Europe, anthropological studies of refugees and asylum are quite recent and mainly linked to the founding of the Refugee Studies Centre (initially Refugee Studies Programme) at the University of Oxford in 1982<sup>2</sup>. These studies represent a minority in the vast field of refugee studies—which is largely dominated by a law and policy approach—and are mostly focused on refugee camps in the South and on international humanitarian aid. Traditionally,

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1 The 1948 Italian Constitution also mentions "the right of asylum in the territory of the Italian Republic" (Article 10(3)). But Constitutional asylum has rarely been applied, and it is commonly understood as a right to remain in the country while waiting for the claim to be processed according to more recent EU procedures.

2 Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 1992; Malkki, 1995. Cf. Whyte, 2011 for a synthetic review of earlier ethnographic studies on refugees and forced migrations in Europe.

tional ethnographic studies of refugee camps deal with large numbers of persons usually coming from the same country (or area, or even the same town or village), often sharing culture, language or beliefs, and residing in the same camp for a prolonged period of time. On the contrary, more recent ethnographic approaches to asylum seekers and refugees in the North are confronted with a new and different phenomenon. Be it in large centres (for the reception, identification or administrative detention of migrants) or in small local projects for refugees' reception and integration, anthropologists doing their fieldwork in Europe meet with a radical heterogeneity of scattered individuals who barely know each other: single men and women who had to leave behind their children or spouses, their social and family ties shattered and severed. With this multitude of single individuals who do not have the same nationality, culture, religion or language and who are not linked by social or family ties, what they have in common is their shared experience of "learning to become refugees" through a complex and standardized bureaucratic procedure of uncertain duration.

The institutional dimension is therefore central to the study of asylum in the North, since it is through specific institutional practices that refugees are made or recognized: this is a process that Soguk (1999) has termed "refugeeing". As mentioned above, the asylum juridical and administrative procedure is undergoing a process of progressive homogenization across Europe; yet to become a refugee in Italy, France or Germany can entail completely different experiences and mean different things, and persons applying with a very similar persecution story can have totally divergent outcomes depending on the country processing their application. If norms and rules are being unified, institutional and administrative practices which translate abstract international rights into local procedures are, on the contrary, embedded in specific national and local contexts and fragmented across different state institutions and non-state or private organizations and associations. From their first arrival in a European country to the final outcome of their application, asylum seekers meet with police staff, bureaucrats, translators, social workers, medical doctors, legal experts, lawyers and judges who, in various contexts and at different stages, have (or appear to

have) the power to determine their future and manage their stay. It is during these numerous encounters that some migrants become refugees or are granted some type of international protection. The formal and informal practices that structure the relationships between applicants and asylum institutions and organizations (as well as among different institutional branches and organizations) are contingent and specific, even though inspired by similar transnational norms and procedures.

Drawing on recent ethnographic research I have both coordinated and carried out, in this chapter I focus on the asylum procedure in a northeastern Italian region, in order to highlight important aspects of institutional processes and practices which eventually contribute to determine the applications' outcome. As I will try to show, such aspects can best be grasped adopting an ethnographic approach. At the same time, many segments of the long asylum procedure in Italy are not easily accessible to traditional ethnographic fieldwork, thus calling for the adoption of alternative methodologies.

In the next paragraph I sketch a quick history of the asylum system in Italy and briefly describe the institutional articulation of the asylum procedure, both at the national and local level. I then provide a short review of anthropological studies of institutions and organizations in order to highlight the discipline's contribution to the topic, especially in relation to asylum. The last paragraph focuses on two dimensions that cut across the different institutional spaces in which the asylum procedure is fragmented –namely, the moral and the pedagogical dimension. These dimensions can be better revealed when shifting from a law-and-policy approach to an anthropological analysis of the ways in which local practices differently employ national and international asylum norms and rules.

## 1.1 Seeking asylum in Italy

In Italy, public concern about asylum seekers and refugees emerged in the mid 1990s, when thousands of people seeking protection entered the country following the war in the former Yugoslavia and in Kosovo. Emergency aid,

initially offered on a voluntary basis by local NGOs and civil or religious associations, was soon reshaped by the creation of a more structured national network, the first Identification Centres for migrants, and local reception projects financed by the EU Commission. From 2001, local asylum reception projects are directly coordinated and monitored by UNHCR and the Italian Home Office through the creation of the National Asylum Programme (PNA), which in 2002 turned into the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR).

SPRAR is a multilevel governance system: a web of projects of “assistance, protection and socio-economic integration promoted by local authorities through the activation of territorial networks engaging non-governmental organizations, agencies and institutions with experience and competence in social and productive matters” (IntegraRef, 2008). Its activities, policies and practices which are implemented at the provincial and municipal level, are coordinated under the supervision of a Central Service (Servizio Centrale) based in Rome and managed by the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI). Local authorities’ participation in the SPRAR system works on a voluntary basis: municipalities applying to the national programme receive financial support to set up “Projects for the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees”<sup>3</sup>, which they implement in collaboration with local NGOs, voluntary associations, and civil society or religious organizations.

This “integrated” multi-level system is not the only one providing asylum seekers with first aid and basic services. After submitting their claim at any Police office or directly at the border, most asylum applicants in Italy (about 70%) are sent to large Reception Centres for Asylum Seekers (CARA); only a small number enters a SPRAR project while waiting for their cases to be

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<sup>3</sup> I translate with “reception” the Italian word *accoglienza* in order to emphasize the concept’s bureaucratic dimension, which I examine here. But the Italian word also entails a less “neutral” nuance and it could therefore be translated as “hospitality”, a word sporadically mentioned in Italian media and political discourse, while explicitly employed in the Greek asylum policy (cf. Rozakou, 2012).

examined. Created in 2008, the CARA are a strict-control type of centre usually located quite far from urban areas: since access to legal aid and information is severely constrained and little or no social, economic or linguistic service is provided, CARA are described as long-term parking-places for human beings. On the contrary, the SPRAR system is made of small local projects more often located inside (or close to) towns and villages; the projects usually host applicants in apartments rather than in semi-closed centres; they often provide Italian language and job re-training courses, as well as legal support. Yet, the criterion behind the decision as to who should be sent where appears confused and arbitrary (SPRAR, 2010, p. 57). The situation became even more complicated after the so-called Arab spring and the war in Libya, when the arrival of hundreds from North Africa was dealt by the Italian government by setting up a third temporary system. These persons, now targeted with the new label ENA (Emergenza Nord Africa –North African Emergency), were the competence of the Civil Protection Corps, traditionally in charge of natural disasters<sup>4</sup> (Olivieri, 2011).

Once in Italy, the first asylum application step takes place at a Police office where applicants are required to fill out a short screening Form (Modulo C/3) with standard questions in limited, closed fields. In this Form the flight story, its motives and the escape route are reduced to bare facts and simple linear trajectories. It is this simplified story—from which all “background noises”<sup>5</sup> are removed—that is later compared to the extended narrative recalled during the following step. It is often during this first appointment that fingerprints and pictures of the applicant are taken and inserted in the Eurodac international police database. The second step is a key moment of the asylum procedure given its centrality for the status determination: the extended interview in front of the first instance Board (Commissione territoriale), which is composed of four members, one from each body involved

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4 The process is quite recent and no extensive research is available (but see now Bracci 2012 on Tuscany). For this reason, and also given its peculiarity, I will not address procedures of international protection for persons coming from Tunisia or Libya, dealt by so-called ENA projects.

5 On the bureaucratic simplification of complex stories, both in Southern refugee camps and in Northern asylum centres, cf. Malkki, 1996 and Blommaert, 2001 respectively.

(i.e. Prefecture, Police headquarters, Local authority, and UNHCR)<sup>6</sup>. As required by the EC Qualification Directive, the material elements produced by the claimant and the story of persecution recalled during the interview are examined, in order to assess the internal coherence of the narrative and that related events do not run counter to “generally known facts available on the case”. If the applicant is found generally credible, the Commission can grant the refugee status, a subsidiary (three-year) protection or a humanitarian (one-year) leave to remain, otherwise the claim is rejected. Rejection can lead to the final steps of the procedure, i.e. the two levels of appeal in front of a civil Tribunal and an Appeal court, where the claimant can be assisted by a lawyer. Rejected applicants have thirty days to appeal, reduced to fifteen for those inside CARA. If the response remains negative after a second appeal, they have to leave the country (see Fig. 1 for a schematic representation of the international protection iter).

According to Eurostat (2012), in 2011 some 34,115 persons applied for asylum in Italy. So far 25,655 applications have been processed, of which 18,170 (70.8%) were rejected. Of the 7,485 positive results: 1,870 obtained refugee status; 2,265 the subsidiary protection; and 3,350 a one-year humanitarian leave to remain.

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6 At the claimant's request, a translator and/or a social worker can be present.

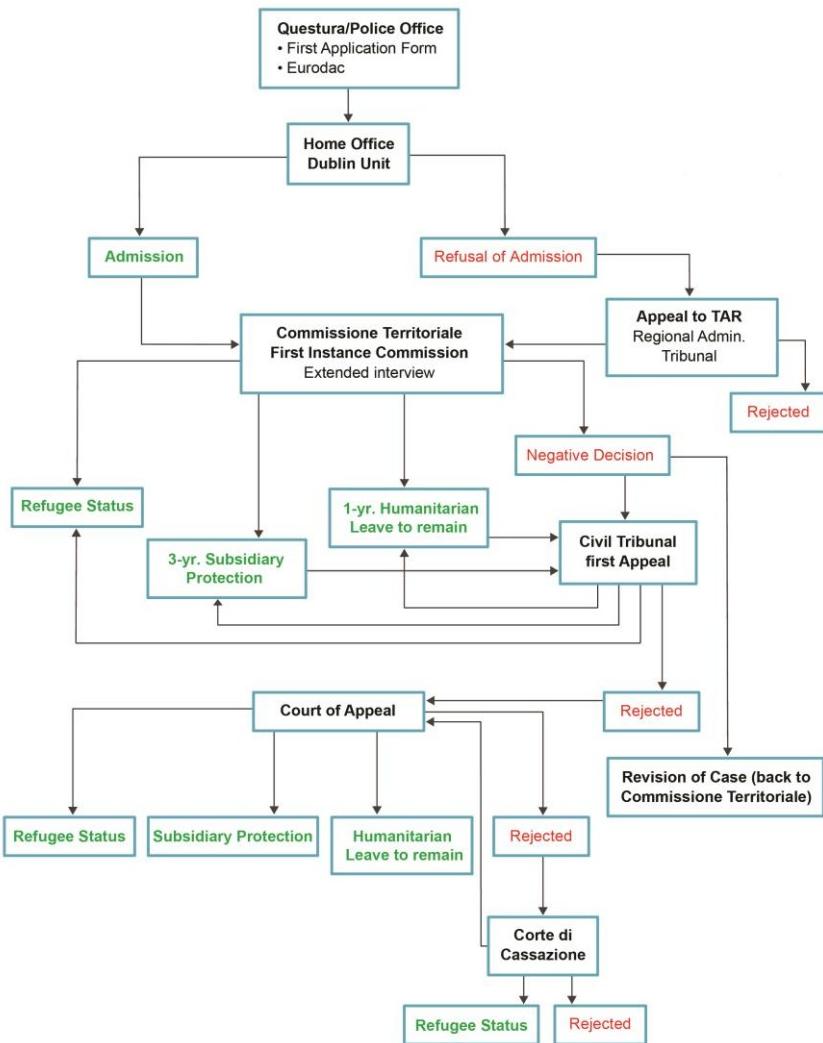


Fig. 1 – International protection procedure in Italy

## 1.2 The ubiquitous role of social workers

What I summarized above is the structure of the status determination procedure in Italy, which by and large parallels that of other EU countries. But from asylum seekers' point of view, the picture is less linear and more com-

plicated, because each step of the procedure is made of simultaneous encounters with various social actors from many institutional branches and levels, whose different roles and aims are often unclear to them. Social workers in reception centres often complain that asylum seekers usually held them responsible for any negative outcome—even for applications' rejection, which they have no power to determine<sup>7</sup>. In 2009, while doing fieldwork in a SPRAR reception centre in Emilia-Romagna region<sup>8</sup>, I attended a meeting between asylum seekers hosted by the project, volunteers serving as language teachers, and the project's career advisor from the local Social Security office managing the project. The former wanted to ask the latter why none of them had been offered job grants or re-training courses during that entire year. The career advisor explained that, in the past, the local market had offered employment opportunities for low and unqualified jobs "which are the types of jobs that better suit you all", but the present economic crisis had dramatically reduced those opportunities. He explained:

The market is wild and the economic crisis is huge: millions of Italians find that doors are closed. Here we can only offer poor material: poor because you come from other countries, culturally poor because you do not speak the Italian language, you are fragile goods, with no experience of our country, you do not understand everything, you belong to that immense pool of workforce called low-profile [...] it is all the more difficult to convince employers to hire most fragile and needy persons like you to perform even low-profile jobs.[...] We did work in other sectors: with former convicts and drug addicts. It was five of us and now there is just me; we found solutions ... but for others (Sorgoni, 2011a, pp. 22–23).

This excerpt from a long and frustrating meeting is quite dense, as the career advisor adopts a disclaiming attitude and lists objective facts in order to jus-

<sup>7</sup> For similar examples in different European countries or types of centres, cf. Griffiths, 2011; Maryns, 2006 and Whyte, 2011; Kobelinsky (2011) shows how recent immigration laws in France reinforce such confusion, prescribing that social worker take part in the actual forced removal of migrants from the centres.

<sup>8</sup> Since I did my research in this Region, where CARA are not present, all my data refer to SPRAR projects.

tify what asylum seekers seem to perceive and present as his responsibility. That the economic crisis is hitting everywhere in Europe is incontestable fact, and “even” Italian citizens (with their supposedly more valuable social and cultural capital) struggle to find a job. The crisis is clearly also responsible for the human resources cuts inside his office, which leaves him alone to do the job previously assigned to five workers. While showing that he is not the one to blame—both because he did his job, and because his tasks and duties are defined by the institution he works for (“we did work … we found solutions”)—he simultaneously seems to suggest that the very essence of asylum seekers’ condition can best be exemplified by an even longer list of what they lack (they are defined as low-profile, fragile goods lacking experience and understanding abilities). It is therefore this supposedly inherent incompleteness of asylum seekers, coupled with the tremendous global economic crisis, that is to blame for the project’s failure. It seems reasonable to ask: What connects powerful national and international political and economic forces to asylum seekers’ individual lives? What stands “in the middle”?

I suggest that what is actually missing from the career advisor’s articulated picture is precisely his part in it, i.e. the ubiquitous role played by social workers from state institutions, non-state organizations or private associations, which manage asylum seekers through the whole process. Social workers are potentially present at each step of the long procedure, their competences spanning from assistance to control. Acting as intermediaries between transnational asylum rights and their national and local understandings, they translate norms and rules into everyday practices, affecting the lives and futures of asylum seekers and refugees. Despite their tasks being often clearly defined, the close and intimate nature of the relationship with asylum applicants (partly inbuilt in this type of assistance and care work), allows for important margins of discretionary power<sup>9</sup> that an anthropological approach permits us to articulate.

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<sup>9</sup> On “mapping the middle” and on intermediaries as translators between transnational and local policy levels, cf. Merry, 2006; on bureaucratic arbitrariness see Lipsky’s pioneering work (1980).

Ethnographic studies of organizations and institutions propose to move away from “the modernist paradigm of organizations as rational and replete with objective facts which had dominated organizational studies” (Wright, 1994, p. 3). Anthropology’s interpretative approach allows us to deconstruct the representation of institutions as closed sites with a coherent aim and a strong organizational culture reproducing itself through time—a view which has long dominated the social sciences and which reproduces management élites’ presentations of the organizations themselves (Abélès, 2001). Assuming institutions instead to be porous sites for constructing meaning, anthropology focuses on the ways in which different actors within organizations understand, translate and put into practice norms and procedures, and formal and informal relations reshape tasks and objectives from the inside. Anthropologists Hirsch and Gellner (2001, pp. 2–4) thus define organizations: “they all have explicit rules, a division of labour, and aims that involve acting on or changing everyday life”, as well as a shared governing ethos “of some sort”. But in order to study them ethnographically, anthropologists should look at internal divergent interests of its constituent parts, and at the wider contexts within which they operate. They should be able to produce “details and conclusions that are unexpected” and reflect organizations’ internal polyphony—as Bate (1997) suggested; but they should also “pay attention to questions of power and inequality”, emphasize “both what people say and what they do” looking for “connections and disconnections between the two”, observe “what people do and say when they are ‘off-duty’”, and finally look “closely at how language is used” (Hirsch & Gellner, 2001, p. 9)<sup>10</sup>. This approach can help uncover hidden or unintended dimensions inscribed in bureaucratic practices of institutions and organizations in charge of the asylum procedure.

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10 For critical and detailed Italian reviews of anthropological studies of organizations, and of States institutions, cf. Zinn, 2007 and Palumbo, 2011 respectively. For methodological insights cf. Schwartzman, 1993.

## 2. Hidden dimensions of asylum procedure

Police officer: ((in Italian to the interpreter)) chiedigli il nome di sua madre  
[ask him his mother's name]  
what is the name of your mother ?  
Interpreter: Ef  
Asylum seeker: the name of your mother . your mother's name  
Interpreter: Ef  
Asylum seeker: EF ? JUST EF ?  
((looks at the interpreter remaining silent))  
Interpreter: ((in Italian to the police officer)) dice Ef . Ef è effe in italiano . la lettera effe . sarà l'iniziale del nome . boh . forse non vuole dircelo . non credo che non conosca il nome di sua madre !  
[He says F . F is F in Italian . the letter F . it may be the name's initial . who knows . maybe he doesn't want to tell us . I cannot believe he doesn't know his mother's name !]

This is an excerpt of the first asylum application of a young Nigerian man, which I was allowed to attend. It took place at a Police office, where the applicant was accompanied by a social worker from the local association in charge, in order to fill out the screening Form (Modulo C/3) in front of a police officer and with the aid of an Italian interpreter in English language. It took over two hours to complete the Form's standard questions: a process of reduction and simplification of a complex story into selected facts and punctual events to fit the closed fields of the short bureaucratic Form, replete with misunderstandings of the kind illustrated above. In that specific case, the interpreter took for granted that the noun pronounced by the applicant, which sounded like /ef/, could only correspond to the English spelling of the alphabet letter "F"—and thus to a name's initial. She therefore kept repeat-

ing the same question raising her voice in frustration, at the same time ruling out any possible alternative meaning<sup>11</sup>. In various occasions during the long interrogation, the interpreter tried to make sense of what she could not grasp—and he could not (or did not know how to) better explain—by replacing his silence with her own interpretation, often based on what she assumed to be the appropriate or expected answers vis-à-vis common-sense knowledge and her personal beliefs on “Africa”. The interpreter played a strategic role also in light of the fact that the police officer affirmed from the start that she did not understand a single word of English, thus depending entirely on the opinion of the former. Coupled with the interpreter’s meta-pragmatic comments (“this part is not clear”, “he seems quite vague on this”, “he cannot explain well in English”), expressed only in Italian and directly addressed to the police officer, this interaction—an important step in the asylum procedure—left little room for an active role of the asylum seeker.

To observe such local level interactions among state branches, non-state organizations and asylum seekers allows us to see the final textual product (i.e. the short bureaucratic Form) as the co-constructed outcome of a complex interpretative effort on the part of different subjects with divergent aims and roles, cultural resources and skills, and power positions. Unlike with ordinary conversation, institutional interactions like asylum interviews are characterized by constraints and expectations related to the speakers’ different roles and positions within a space of interaction in which the interviewers detain institutional powers they do not share with the claimant/interviewee. As Serranò and Fasulo (2011, p. 32) remark, the interviewers’ identity cannot be separated from the institution they work for, and in relation to which the interviewees mould their narratives, thus anticipating their potential interests and uses.

Hirsch and Gellner’s volume (2001) is a valuable collection of essays that deal with important theoretical, methodological and ethical issues related to

<sup>11</sup> In Yoruba language, *Èfè* means small party; *Àfè* means Enjoyment; *Ofè* is Offer: I am grateful to Franck Viderot for this information.

ethnographic research inside various types of organizations. But taking asylum procedure as a lens through which to observe how state and non-state institutions contribute to the actual production of juridical and social categories of subjects (refugees, illegal migrants, citizens ...) obliges us to also look outside organizations or, more precisely, to face questions of scale and levels. In the field of forced migrations, different branches of bureaucracy interact at various administrative levels; at the local level, these branches also interact and coordinate with non-state organizations and associations. Subsequently, both types of institutions translate and transcribe asylum seekers' narratives, and put into practice (thus adapting to, but also reshaping) rules and norms forged elsewhere by several transnational bodies of governance (UNHCR, EU). In his latest study of bureaucracy and poverty as structural violence in India, Akhil Gupta clarifies these methodological issues: after remarking that "the translocal nature of the state makes it extremely difficult to decide on which level one should concentrate in doing fieldwork", he argues that "the answer depends on the question one wishes to ask about the state, but a large range of questions involve several levels at once". This is a difficult methodological condition which renders the study of the state "necessarily partial and incomplete" (2012, pp. 63–64). He then specifies:

I chose to study the lowest levels of the administrative hierarchy because that is where I could observe poor rural people coming into contact with state officials. The higher one goes in the bureaucratic hierarchy, the less such interactions are likely to be found (*Ibid.*: 64).

I think that a similar consideration also applies to the study of asylum seekers in Italy (as probably in the rest of Europe)<sup>12</sup>; in any event, it is at this lower and local scale that most ethnographic studies on the refugee status determination procedure are located. As the above dialogue shows, an anthropological analysis of the ways in which "intermediaries" working in

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12 But cf. Rabinow and Marcus, 2008 on the relevance of ethnographic research with "truth-claimers" such as managers and intellectual élites.

local institutions and organizations variously understand and employ national and international asylum norms and rules in their everyday practices and contacts with asylum seekers can help uncover dimensions that cut across the different institutional spaces in which the asylum procedure is fragmented, and that remain opaque when adopting different approaches. As Heath Cabot (2013, p. 146) noted, “practices of social assistance or support are important sites where the shifting boundaries between State and non-State are contested and negotiated through, often powerful, emotional engagements”. In this final section, I focus on two such dimensions which could be referred to as the moral and the pedagogical dimension.

## 2.1 The moral dimension

Credibility is a keyword in the asylum procedure in Europe. According to Council Qualification Directive 2004/83/EC (art. 4¶5), if the applicant cannot support the claim with documentary or other material evidence, decision makers should alternatively assess, among other things, whether or not the applicant’s statements are coherent and plausible and establish his/her “general credibility”. But in many countries, credibility assessment has actually replaced the examination of documental evidence; as a consequence, applications are increasingly rejected on a “lack of credibility” ground. Clearly, it is extremely important that what applicants tell be taken into serious consideration, especially in light of the fact that those who leave their country because of (fear of) persecution may not be able to readily submit documentary evidence proving the persecution, or even their identity. Yet the Council Directive does not explain how to ascertain narratives’ coherence or claimants’ credibility, which makes space for arbitrary decisions and raises questions on the legal significance of this concept (Sweeney, 2009). When identity documents or other types of material evidence are lacking, decision makers (first instance commission members, and tribunal or appeal judges) usually scrutinize the story of persecution and flight that asylum seekers recall during the extended interviews, and they compare it both to applicants’ written memory initially attached to the first screening Form and to “generally known facts” on the applicant’s country of origin, in order to seek out inconsistencies. As mentioned above, however, the procedure is quite long,

and it can take months before a final decision is reached. This means that asylum seekers are expected to recall (or write) their story more than once on various occasions to different subjects.

Social scientists working on issues such as memory and life stories have long discussed gaps, discrepancies and disjunctions between versions of the same story, which change when given at different times or in front of different audiences, and depending on the social context (Ochs & Capps, 1996; Eastmond, 2007). And research on traumatic memory shows that most painful events tend to be recalled in a fragmented and “interrupted” way, so that apparently incoherent or discrepant versions may rather testify to painful experiences (Beneduce, 2008)<sup>13</sup>. In addition, the stories asylum seekers tell in order to claim international protection are performed in highly controlled contexts where power relations are heavily asymmetrical; where the pace and rhythm of storytelling are dictated (and interrupted) by the bureaucratic procedure, and the expressive modalities are severely constrained by standard formats; and where those who tell and those who judge do not share the same cultural background, thus producing mistranslations and misunderstandings which are eventually used to cast doubts on the claimant’s credibility<sup>14</sup>. Yet, stories told during asylum interviews are believed, expected and presented as able to unfold smoothly, freely disclosing the claimant’s true story in front of the institutional audience. While from a Conversation Analysis perspective the interview interaction is long seen as an assembly process, “an organized social activity” (Kasper, 2013, p. 3) which should be analysed, approaches like Linguistic Ethnography also widen their empirical scope investigating communication as the interplay between persons, encounters and institutions that reach beyond the encounter-on-hand, simultaneously acknowledging the “efforts individuals make to get other people to recognize their feelings, perceptions, interests” (Rampton, 2010, p. 235). When applied to the asylum procedure, these approaches allow us to challenge the

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13 A discussion of epistemological, methodological and ethical aspects engendered in ethnographic research on collective memory of violence in Italy is Clemente and Dei, 2005.

14 For critical anthropological discussions of asylum credibility in various Western countries, cf. Blommaert, 2001; Bohmer and Shuman, 2008; Cabot, 2011; Good, 2007; Maryns, 2006; Sorgoni, 2011b.

widely spread belief that the interview serves as a window into the answerers' inner world, their "true" experiences, memories and feelings, and to acknowledge the wider bureaucratic and legal asymmetrical context, including also "preceding events and texts" that frame and shape it<sup>15</sup>.

When assessing the general plausibility of a story, especially if material evidence is lacking, decision makers should gather information also on the country of origin of the applicant. Yet, in Italy in particular (but not only), this preliminary investigation is very rarely performed and first instance commission members often base their credibility assessment on common sense and logic deductions of a normative kind. For instance, the story of a woman from Cameroon was not considered credible by the commission because she was not killed along with her father and brother, with whom she was kept segregated and tortured. "Why do you think you were left alive?" asked a member of the commission. In the transcript of the decisions which denied her any international protection, subsequently endorsed by the first appeal judge, all decision makers find it implausible that paramilitary corps kept political opponents in prison when they could be eliminated on the spot, that they were all kept in the same cell, and finally that one of them was released, despite the sadly known common practice to leave a witness alive as public warning. They also believed documents certifying medical care provided by the perpetrators of the violence were a forgery, despite this practice being also widely documented as a public display of impunity.

According to Paul Ricoeur (2003, p. 231), in the modern judiciary system the trustworthy witness is he who can keep his statement unaltered across time, his credibility being strengthened by the reiteration/keeping of his word, which adds a moral dimension to the act of witnessing itself. In the Italian asylum procedure, as elsewhere, credibility assessment is predicated upon the narrative consistency and coherence across time. Those who assess the credibility of asylum stories usually assume (or pretend) that applicants'

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15 Cf. Briggs, 2007 for an assessment of different modes through which interviewing gets naturalised in the media, state bureaucracies and also in social sciences.

accounts flow freely, voluntarily and uninterrupted during different types of interviews; that traumatic memory be preserved unchanged across time remaining “consistent” throughout different accounts; that it should come easy to tell intimate (sometime unspeakable) experiences of violence and persecution to complete strangers who are often of the opposite sex. Since none of the above assumptions applies to the practical conditions of the bureaucratic encounter during which asylum seekers are expected to produce a credible narrative, incoherences, gaps or “plot-holes” (Coutin, 2001) are likely to be also the product of those conditions (rather than a decisive proof of the applicant’s lack of credibility). That is, they may be generated ex post by the very process which is set out to detect their presence. Moreover, as Briggs (2007, p. 562) noted, “power lies not just in controlling how discourse unfolds in the context of its production but gaining control over its recontextualization—shaping how it draws on other discourses and contexts and when, where, how, and by whom it will be subsequently used”. Once uttered, the words of asylum seekers enter a long process of complex intertextual relations upon which the claimants may retain little or no control.

Under such practical conditions, credibility during the interview has much to do with the ability to appear trustworthy: not only what is told, but also how it is told becomes crucial. In this light, credibility becomes an art. In part differing from other European countries, in Italy those procedural steps where the narrative is assessed are “black boxed” and de facto not accessible to researchers, who are not allowed to observe (let alone record) how decisions are taken at first instance commissions and in appeal tribunals. This means that an analysis of the communicative interaction during the procedure is at present virtually impossible in the Italian asylum system. Here, an alternative methodology to participant observation (or video/audio recording for communicative interaction analysis) is the analysis of texts and documents produced by asylum bureaucracies<sup>16</sup>, as well as interviews with social workers (who can sporadically attend first commissions), lawyers, and asylum seekers and refugees. While it is difficult to trace signs of perfor-

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16 An updated review on anthropological research on documents is Hull, 2012.

mances and other non-verbal significant interactions inside documents like the legal transcripts of asylum hearings, case workers, legal experts and refugees easily refer to non-verbal and performative aspects as crucial for the outcome. The display of "authentic" (i.e. not staged or excessive) suffering proves that the asylum seeker is telling the truth, as well as the applicant's ability to conform to "institutionally inscribed codes, modes and views" which requires having access to specific communicative resources<sup>17</sup>. Here, differential social and cultural capital can play a crucial role, and those who learn how to master appropriate narrative codes, linguistically and stylistically, have a better chance to appear trustworthy. Performance and narrative abilities thus play an important role in the moral dimension of asylum procedure, as implicit criteria used to ascertain truth<sup>18</sup>. But performance can also be openly recognized as a crucial ingredient by case workers, as the following example from a SPRAR project shows. In order to help asylum seekers to write up a credible testimony, a legal advisor compared his role to that of an art director who literally helps an actor to stage the required performance. As he explained:

I work on the discourse construction, almost on a script, on the cut, in view of the interview [...] when their story is very weak I suggest they stress the dreadful condition of their country, thus aiming at least to get subsidiary protection. (Pozzi, 2011, p. 46)<sup>19</sup>

17 Maryns, 2006, p. 13 and also Blommaert, 2001, p. 414.

18 These are probably not the only criteria affecting the application outcome, and influential variables are also related to personal characteristics of both the applicants (country of origin, age, sex), and the decision makers (institutional role, experience in the field, education, personal beliefs, and also age and sex). One day, during my fieldwork in a SPRAR office, a social worker introduced me to a young, shy and quite nervous asylum seeker who was soon to be interviewed by the Commission. When the lady left, the social worker commented "Did you see how beautiful she is? She is like a queen! She has a very weak story, but I believe she'll have no problem...". Noting my puzzled expression, she turned to the other social worker in the office, then they both laughed and added "she is going to be interviewed by X [a retired male officer from the police] ... that's why we believe she'll get the status straight away!". A month later I discovered that their guess was right. Although I don't know if it did apply to this specific case, that physical aspect, age and sex can play a role in the decision is common belief among social workers.

19 On asylum narratives and social or legal advisors' role, cf. Cabot, 2011; Coutin, 2001; D'Halluin, 2010; Kobelinsky, 2010; McKinley, 1997; Sbriccoli and Jacoviello, 2001; Sbriccoli and Perugini, 2012.

Credibility and trust as crucial moral dimensions of the procedure are directly linked to merit, in that in the eyes of social workers trustworthy asylum seekers also deserve to be assisted by ad hoc projects and to receive social benefits. Thus the sequence credibility-trust-merit crosscuts different branches of the asylum structure, connecting the legal procedure's bureaucratic branch to that of social care and welfare benefits which takes place inside reception projects. At the level of social services and welfare assistance managed by local state institutions and non-state organizations, social workers and volunteers—who play no official role in the status determination's legal outcome—nonetheless usually try to informally ascertain the general credibility of projects' guests. In one of the projects observed, it was common practice among volunteers serving either as language teachers or as dormitory staff to encourage asylum seekers to disclose their story of persecution and flight. Such a display of trust in the social services on the part of asylum seekers was taken as a sign of the latter's good faith and honesty, which in turn merited to be compensated through benefits and welfare assistance. Quite interestingly, the sequence worked also in the opposite direction, and those who behaved in a wrong way (for instance showing up late at meetings or courses organized by the project, or failing to keep their lodgings clean to an appropriate standard) were considered as not deserving the assistance accorded them, which in turn shed doubts on their general trustworthiness (Starna, 2011). This way, due rights and support services set up specifically for asylum seekers are treated as rare prizes discretionarily bestowed by social workers or volunteers, depending on their evaluation of asylum seekers' appropriate (i.e. deserving) behaviour<sup>20</sup>.

## 2.2 A pedagogical project

To conclude, I wish to briefly address a second dimension of the asylum process directly connected to standards of proper behaviour, which becomes

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20 As Zetter (2007) suggested, the refugee status—the realm of rights par excellence—has increasingly become a restricted privilege for those who deserve it. More recently, Fassin elaborates on those informal divisions that shape social order whereby “du register juridique de distinction on était passé à un register moral de disqualification” (2010, p. 9).

visible when adopting an ethnographic approach. The explicit objective of the SPRAR national system is to offer assistance to asylum seekers and “new” refugees in view of their future integration in the country, which itself can be obtained by reaching individual self-sufficiency (*autonomia*). SPRAR Report explains that the system offers not only first material aid but also a guided path towards self-sufficiency which includes integration, and actions of counselling and support to find employment and accommodation, as well as minors’ access to the schooling system (Sprar, 2010, p. 23). From the same Report, we also learn that in 2009, only 42% of refugees assisted by the system left the programme having “achieved integration”. Along with the high percentage (30%) of those forced to exit the programme simply because their assistance period expired (thus having neither employment nor accommodation), it is important to stress the system’s narrow understanding of “integration”, reduced to a job and lodging (of whatever kind). With no reference to other socio-institutional issues such as social participation, access to and use of institutional services, citizenship and right to vote, family reunification, and higher education, the Italian asylum system seems to understand integration as synonymous with basic self-sufficiency.

When looking at specific asylum projects and centres, actions and practices adopted towards integration often take the form of pedagogical projects with a strong patronising and paternalistic accent, aiming to teach foreign adults “how to live here”. In one local project I observed, a social worker repeatedly tried to convince a young Eritrean mother recently arrived in Italy to send her two-year-old daughter to a local nursery in order to be able to find herself a job. As the director of the project explained to me, the main reason behind the social worker’s insistence was not economic self-sufficiency, but to teach the young woman that “not accepting to separate from her child, she would harm both herself and the little girl, because here we do not live like that”. Such modernising effort did not take into account the fact that the woman had crossed the desert and the Mediterranean sea on her own, delivering her baby on the way after having left two other children behind. At the other end of the national territory, in a Sicilian CARA, another Eritrean woman and mother of four children—who had likewise managed on her

own to take them all to Italy through an extremely dangerous trip along the same route, protecting them all along—was encouraged to quit a few-hours-a-day cleaning job she found nearby, to stay with her children and thus become “a more responsible mother”. To persuade her, social workers also insistently stressed the value of the project assistance, which took care of her without pushing her towards self-sufficiency (Pinelli, 2011). The two examples are interesting because they both incidentally deal with young single Eritrean mothers waiting for their status determination process to be completed, but they do so in seemingly opposite ways: the first project explicitly proposing a model of “modern” (i.e. working) mother, ready to place her infant in a nursery; the second teaching how to become a better (i.e. full-time) mother by dropping a few-hours job and remain economically dependent. On the one hand, this signals the wide internal difference among reception projects across the country, so much so that to be a single-mother asylum seeker can be a totally different experience depending on the reception project one is assigned to. But on the other hand, both examples share a similar strong pedagogical aim, a strive to teach how to became a “good mother”, be it of the modern/working type or, on the opposite, the more traditional full-time (and dependent) nurturer. In her essay Pinelli rightly stresses the gender bias at work in reception projects, whereby foreign women are often specific targets of modernization stances, simultaneously recognizing that a pedagogical drive also addresses male “guests”<sup>21</sup>.

Such instances are probably structurally inbuilt in the professional figure as it is ambiguously defined by the SPRAR Manual, which requires social workers to set up a relationship of “reciprocal trust” with asylum seekers, taking care of their most intimate daily needs while keeping on a “professional, not personal” level. What we find when we move from the ideology of social support to its embodiment in daily practices of help and humanitarian assistance, is rather a non-reciprocal compulsory trust which always

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21 In relation to a Turin-based project, Vacchiano, 2011 refers to a “moral pedagogy”; in Ravenna, Vianelli (2011) detected a similar inclination among unpaid volunteers teaching Italian language.

matches care to control.<sup>22</sup> A regular consuetudinary practice spread across most reception projects of the country are the usually weekly “lodging meetings” that social workers organize to allow hosted asylum seekers (who are compelled to share a flat), to discuss problems and needs or solve misunderstandings and quarrels. Many projects also offer psychological consultancy to asylum seekers who explicitly require it or who are labelled as “vulnerable” subjects. One of the projects I studied conflated the two services by employing a psychologist to run the meetings in flats shared by women asylum seekers. The psychologist rightly acknowledged that, as non-dangerous adults, those women could not be forced to undertake a psychological therapy, but she also explained that the project management “considered the group therapy as compulsory”. By conflating the two support services, the hosted women were summoned weekly to discuss problems that could arise from a condition of forced co-residence with other strangers, at the same time being encouraged and advised to reflect upon, and share, their past history under the supervision of a psychologist. The latter added:

a group of women [...] forced to live together may encounter problems. This is why it [the psychological therapy] was compulsory. It was a top-down injunction [...]. It was suggested [by the project management] to sanction those who did not show up, to withdraw their pocket-money. But I do not think this actually happened. (Starna, 2011, p. 130, trans. by the author)

According to the project’s regulation, the function of regular flats-meetings was to teach hosts “how to live here” by teaching them to respect both project schedules and timetables, and the premises were they were hosted, taking care of the furniture and keeping the lodgings clean respecting assigned cleaning turns; and to periodically check that all the above run smoothly. Sanctions including the withdrawal of pocket money were indeed adopted when such regulations were not fully respected, and a moral judgement of each asylum seeker based on appropriate behaviour was accordingly

<sup>22</sup> On the Italian region we studied, cf. Urru, 2011 for such structural ambiguity; and Gianfagna, 2011 for a hidden form of strict control on asylum seekers’ attitudes.

formulated by the social workers and the psychologist. But by conflating the residential meetings with group-therapy sessions, a moral judgment was also directly linked to each individual's readiness to accept a purportedly free psychological support. Those women who hardly showed up at meetings were labelled as un-cooperative and un-trustful—and therefore unworthy—despite the fact that they could be absent for many different reasons (including contingent impediments, unfamiliarity with psychological therapy, and a reasonable scepticism to fully trust a psychologist hired by the same project that controls the whole reception process and could jeopardize the very determination procedure). Others did show up on a more regular basis although, as the therapist specified, those who did recall a traumatic past story during a meeting never showed up again afterwards.

In her seminal work on humanitarian aid and refugees in the global South, Barbara Harrell-Bond (1999) traced a shift in the humanitarian paradigm, from aid policies that treated refugees "as persons" to a more recent (post-cold war) production of helpless victims who need to be educated. She thus argued that it is not the need for help which is in question, but rather the type of help provided. Anthropological literature on humanitarian aid and social support has subsequently acknowledged the "endemic ethical dilemmas" of humanitarianism (Feldman, 2007, p. 692), its inherently asymmetrical and hierarchical nature, the inextricable nexus between assisting and monitoring or controlling, as well as the effects of humanitarian practice on both providers and recipients (Redfield, 2006). Ethnographic studies have thus challenged abstract generalizations, exploring the historical, cultural and political nature of humanitarian aid and social support. As Rozakou recently noted, such comparative perspectives demonstrated that the primary intention of social workers and volunteers to assist refugees and asylum seekers should not be overlooked; at the same time, we should also be aware that "they strive to help the people they meet ... and improve their living conditions in ways that seem to be universal and natural but are, in

fact, profoundly cultural" (2012, p. 574)<sup>23</sup>. On a broader, more general and theoretical scale, this issue touches upon the thin line between "routine practices that proceed with little reflection and planning, and agentive acts that intervene in the world with something in mind (or in the heart)" (Ortner, 2006, p. 136).

Within the projects I examined, in a somehow circular way, the profoundly cultural pedagogical programme connected with the moral dimension discussed before. Projects proposed to asylum seekers specific paths of help and assistance with standardized steps (from first material aid, to Italian language courses, psychological consultancies, and in some cases re-training courses), and they informally set norms of conduct and prescribed appropriate "natural" behaviour, all of which was (presented as if it were) aimed at their future integration and self-sufficiency. Ethnographic findings show that asylum seekers who comply better to the projects' expectations, following all the required steps and behaving accordingly, were likely to benefit more from actions of counselling and support which were designed and presented as equally directed to all "guests". Yet, the official numbers and figures about "integration" mentioned above also show that compliance to projects requirements, duties and regulations has no direct consequence for asylum seekers, neither automatically leading to a positive outcome of their determination procedure, nor to a dignified regular life beyond mere survival.

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<sup>23</sup> For a critical analysis of humanitarian work see, among others: Bornstein and Redfield, 2011; Feldman and Ticktin, 2010; Hyndman, 2000. Cf. Robins, 2009 for an interesting case of creative uses of humanitarian technologies in support of new forms of political agency among refugees.

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# **“My dad has fifteen wives and eight ancestors to care for”: Conveying Anthropological Knowledge to Children and Adolescents**

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## **Abstract**

By analyzing an example from Germany of how anthropology can be put to use in a museum context, this chapter reflects on the responsibility of academic anthropology towards the public and the challenges faced in translating complex anthropological knowledge. It first treats the position of practicing anthropology, thereby situating the subsequent discussion of a pilot project at the University of Münster aimed at public outreach as well as practical training for anthropology students. The analysis focuses on one element within the wider project, an exhibition entitled “Fifteen Wives and Eight Ancestors: Life and Religion Among the Bulsa of Northern Ghana.” The process of developing this exhibition challenged researchers and students to communicate anthropological knowledge to various publics, especially that of children. The project brought together established anthropological researchers, students, exhibit designers and members of the ethnic group to be represented. Among the several challenges described here, in such initiatives there is a fundamental problem of negotiating the complexity of anthropologists’ knowledge with the designers’ predilection for reducing complexity to essentials. In creating an exhibit on savannah life that dealt with topics like kinship and ancestor worship, these two approaches had collaborate to effectively communicate cultural diversity without exoticizing it. By exploring the experience of producing this exhibit, the chapter deals with how anthropology can contribute to intercultural learning and understanding outside of academia.

## 1. Anthropology in practice

Universities trying to put anthropology into practice usually face a number of problems. Not only is there an academic distrust towards the incorporation of seemingly “impure” practitioners from outside academia<sup>1</sup>, but today’s programmatic orientation of anthropology as part of the humanities makes it indeed difficult to fulfill the demands of the outside world. For many, anthropology is not meant to be an applied science in the first place. This is due to the fact that it aims at understanding cultures as shared systems of meanings which are not easy to analyze nor easy to explain. The people anthropologists are dealing with are, first and foremost, partners who ought to be respected in their own specific ways of living and not be dealt with in short-term programs serving the needs of a (mostly European) public. For many good reasons resulting from experiences dating back to colonial and neo-colonial endeavors, most anthropologists refuse to engage in practice whatsoever, considering *fieldwork* as the one and only appropriate practice to be pursued (for an overview cf. Rylko-Bauer, Singer & van Willigen, 2006; Kedia & van Willigen, 2005, pp. 3–10). Any other kind of practice is simply not theirs. Even though German anthropological departments now send their students for internships to museums or other institutions for weeks or months at a time, thus giving them a chance to get some practical experience, this is generally not part of the academic courses, nor does it feed back into the curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

This leaves those who are interested in applied anthropology with no option other than to escape the academic field and develop their own way of professionalism. The result is that there are few interactions between academic

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1 The distinction between the allegedly “pure” academic anthropology and “impure” anthropological practice outside of academia dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century, when social anthropology was established as a scientific discipline (Roberts, 2006; Pink, 2006, pp. 6–7). The distinction has only recently been overcome, though not completely. This is particularly true for German social anthropology, which for many years at most accepted museum anthropologists to become members of staff. “Practical people” hired for courses to provide special knowledge are usually employed on a part time basis.

2 When this project started in 2005, Applied Anthropology had not been established at any German University. Up to 2014, only one of them—the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Tübingen, where the author of this article is member of staff—managed to do so.

and practicing anthropology—with anthropologists neglecting what happens in the name of anthropology “out there”, and practitioners lacking time as well as the opportunity to get some fresh ideas as to the theoretical foundations of their profession. Floating careers between academic and non-academic fields are still relatively rare for European anthropologists, even though they seem to be more common in other parts of the world (Strang, 2009, p. 4).

Considering the great chances involved, this is certainly a lost opportunity. As John van Willigen (1993, p. 17) pointed out, the academic field would indeed largely profit from applied anthropology and is even “historically based on application”. On the other hand, applied anthropologists would be able to benefit enormously from incoming research results, were there some kind of institutionalized exchange between academic and practical anthropology (Pink, 2006, p. 8). But this gap still needs to be closed (anew) and would imply quite substantial adjustments as regards content and methodology in teaching as well as in research, workshops or summer schools. What is most required is training in decision making and consulting, elaborating concrete problem solutions and addressing the public. Most anthropologists have trouble with this way of taking a stand and, moreover, to be publicly exposed. It is nothing they ever learned to do or even had in view.

However, the growing need for well-trained practicing anthropologists and the demand for “going public” due to an increased awareness of cultural diversity motivated many universities to take first steps in the direction of an applied anthropology as part and parcel of their academic discipline. Quite a number of US anthropological departments (currently more than forty) have complied with the new challenges, up to the point that they opened up a new academic field<sup>3</sup> offering degrees in applied anthropology. Their BA and MA graduates have good chances on the job market, e.g. in public administration or institutions of development aid. Alex de Waal even

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3 The traditional four-field model of US anthropology includes cultural anthropology, biological anthropology, linguistic anthropology and archeology. In more than forty universities, this model has been extended with applied anthropology as the fifth field; cf. <http://www.sfaa.net/resources/education/> [last access 12.07.2015]

stated that in the United States anthropology has become “an acknowledged partner in development practice” (de Waal, 2002, p. 254). What might be true for US American anthropologists is certainly far from being real in Europe, but there are in fact rising numbers of anthropologists outside of academia, being employed precisely because of their intercultural competence and intimate knowledge of cultural diversity. There is hope indeed for a gradual incorporation of applied anthropology into European university courses, in no small part due to the Bologna Accords, which not only intended to adjust European educational standards, but also obligated universities to offer more classes in applied science. However, the big change in practical orientation has been far less successful than was intended, not the least due to the persistent differences between academically based and practicing anthropologists.

Few German anthropological departments started well in advance of Bologna to explore the possibilities of applied anthropology, whether by organizing intensive courses of practical work or making students familiar with job options in different sectors. One of the projects thus conducted by the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Münster was a pilot project titled “Anthropology in practice: Anthropological contributions to interculturality”<sup>4</sup>, comprised of a number of seminars from 2002–2005. Several aims were to be pursued: presenting anthropological issues to a broader public; making students familiar with professional practice; conveying extra skills and job orientation; and finding new ways in academic teaching, methodologically as well as personnel-wise, by establishing teams of scientific staff supported by experts from outside the university with an anthropological background.

Among the featured projects: public lectures under the somewhat sensational title “Sex and the Body”, presenting culture-specific concepts of body, gender and sexuality (most appreciated by the general public when it came to the history of Kama Sutra); a series of events featuring lectures, films and dances entitled “The Eternal Now”, focusing on the preservation of values

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<sup>4</sup> Carried out through a grant of the Ministry of Science and Research of the provincial government of Nordrhein-Westfalen.

and rituals worldwide<sup>5</sup>; and an exhibition titled “Fifteen Wives and Eight Ancestors: Life and Religion Among the Bulsa of Northern Ghana”, which will be dealt with in more detail below.

## 2. Applied anthropology in the public space: some experiences

To make my point clear: this article is not meant to give an overview of latest museological theories or new approaches to historical collections, of exciting scenographic offers, ethical issues or post-modern maxims for exhibiting the “other”—all this needs to be considered by museum anthropologists and is part of museology courses. Nor does it contain a comparison of the exhibit described here with other ethnographic exhibitions. Instead, it presents and reflects upon what it means for academic anthropologists when they are asked to convey their scientific knowledge to the public—in particular to a young audience. To accomplish this goal there was a little help from outside specialists and a museum as public *space* for the presentation to be organized<sup>6</sup>. The paper thus changes the perspective: rather than reconsidering the responsibilities and duties of contemporary museums, a topic which has been discussed at length (e.g. Rein, 2013), it addresses the responsibility of academic anthropology towards the public and the challenge to put anthropology to use as part of academic studies. The presentation eventually realized does not claim to reveal an exceptional new approach, and the way of presenting material objects, pictures and life histories might not be very thrilling to those whose daily business is exactly this. But it was exceptional to those who had to do the job being confronted with questions like “How can I (as a student or teacher of cultural anthropology) explain to adults and adolescents of my own society what other people do and how they make

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5 The initial title was “Das Ewige Jetzt. Über die Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart verschiedener Kulturen”.

6 Museums are indeed public spaces which are much more frequented by the public than other spaces and certainly more than universities. One of the arguments for carrying out the student project in a public museum as described in this article was that it would bring anthropology closer to the public.

their lives meaningful?" "How can we make anthropology popular?" "And how does a public space serve to achieve this?"

The exhibit was part of the aforementioned pilot project which intended to examine the possibilities and limitations of integrating applied science into the regular curriculum. A theoretical discussion of the transfer of anthropological and indigenous knowledge to the public was not intended and will therefore be left aside in this paper. What the project did was to provide ample insights into the interactions between scientists and the public, scholars and teachers, students and their interviewees whose "culture" was to be presented. It also elucidated the value of intercultural learning. All participants were well aware of the fact that culture is not a container forcing its residents into a predetermined way of life, but an ongoing process of negotiating shared ways of life. However, *discussing* these issues in theory and *applying* them in public are two strands that need to be brought together in applied anthropology as opposed to academic anthropology. It was part of the project to accomplish this task.

These are my experiences, and the results might help those who undertake similar ventures.

### 3. The exhibition "Fifteen Wives and Eight Ancestors"—conception, challenges, and problems

Looking at this exhibit in hindsight, it was a tremendous challenge and daring effort to realize it as a student project with only minimal financial support and expertise. What was there when it started out was a rag-bag of around 800 objects from Northern Ghana, collected by the Münster anthropologist Franz Kröger over a period of thirty years (fig. 1-2).<sup>7</sup> The idea to bring to light a collection of this kind which so far had led an almost unnoticed existence in an under-utilized departmental room was at first greeted

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<sup>7</sup> The history of this particular collection has not yet been written and was not part of the project. It certainly would be an interesting approach to compare and reevaluate this private collection in comparison to others which have been accommodated at anthropological departments.

with hilarity and immediately incorporated into the pilot project – only later did the project group learn about the enormous workload connected to it. In the end, a group of twenty-five students from anthropology and design studies, together with a team of four university staff members and three outside experts (one being the owner of the collection and an excellent expert of Northern Ghana, the other one a media anthropologist, and the third being experienced in museum education) managed to realize the project and, in my view, did a great job (Klocke-Daffa & Grabenheinrich, 2005, Klocke-Daffa 2007).<sup>8</sup>

What made it particularly difficult was the fact that the exhibition venue was the Museum of Natural History of the City of Münster (which lacked an anthropological museum), one of the well-frequented museums in town, with more than 60% of all visitors being children and adolescents.



Figs. 1–2 – Ethnographic collection showcases at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Münster/Germany, provided by anthropologist Franz Kröger (Photos Sabine Klocke-Daffa, Miriam Grabenheinrich)

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8 I am particularly grateful to Miriam Grabenheinrich, who was the initiator of this project. As an anthropologist and professional television journalist, she was a member of the teaching staff and produced several of the videos on life in Northern Ghana presented during the exhibition.

This fact obliged the organizers to figure out a presentation concept directed to adults as well as to adolescents and incorporate an extra *kid's guide* to address young visitors.

### 3.1 The exhibition concept

The concept for presenting the exhibit was based on three guiding principles: it focused on *content* as well as on *design* and—as part of this concept—it intended to integrate some *voices* of the exhibited group. One of the main challenges was to let students develop their own exhibition concept rather than confronting them with ready-made solutions. This led to a situation in which interdisciplinary meetings were dominated by lengthy discussions, as anthropologists at first glance were not too interested in what they perceived as “unscientific” aspects like wall paper color, lighting systems or minimalist presentation concepts; whereas designers had a hard time following all the ethnographic details singled out to be presented.

#### Content

The exhibit aimed at providing insights into the life of a particular ethnic group, making alternative ways of living and believing an object of discussion, addressing certain themes (at the expense of others) that were familiar to every visitor—such as kinship, education or religion—and presenting the unusual without exoticizing it. Focusing on kinship structures as the title indicates (“My dad has fifteen wives and eight ancestors to care for”), the idea was to present *one family* (the family of Anamogsi, head of compound) and take this as a starting point to explain to visitors—adults as well as adolescents—what it means to grow up in polygynous families, live with the ancestors as the “living dead”, and make a living in an adverse environment providing few options to the individual.

Students also decided to give a *voice* to those whose life was to be presented, being well aware of the fact that “culture” is never a closed box and might be experienced by individuals quite differently. One of the ways to do that was by arranging four videos within the exhibit: these were produced by one of the organizers who managed to interview Bulsa in Ghana, and then they were shown next to the objects presented. Also, she was able to interview

some Bulsa who migrated to Germany many years ago and asked them what their cultural heritage meant to them. Three of them were invited to participate as writers or have their biographies presented in the exhibition catalogue, which they did (Akankyalabey, 2006; Ayaric, 2006; Remmert, 2006).

### Design

The exhibition put special emphasis on a colorful presentation and aimed at confining explanatory texts to a maximum of 800 characters (what a challenge for scientists!), reducing the number of objects to a minimum while increasing the number of photographs and videos to give it a vivid appearance and appeal to all the senses—thus allowing kids to touch, smell and handle objects whenever possible rather than locking all the objects into showcases. To carry out this proposal, a number of objects (not being part of the collection) were bought in local markets in Ghana and later integrated into the exhibit so that visitors could touch them: household utensils like pots, dishes and clothes, agricultural equipment like hoes and baskets, children's school books and handmade toys. The section "local markets" contained different spices, fruits and vegetables (not purchased in Ghana). Additionally, students reconstructed several architectural particularities to be presented, such as a shrine for the ancestors, a small granary used by Bulsa kids for writing exercises and a model of a Bulsa rural compound. This model in particular inspired small visiting kids as it showed houses, play grounds, storage devices and cattle sheds all in one compound, thus presenting an alternative form of living with respect to the one with which most of them were familiar.



Fig. 3 – Small-scale Bulsa compound made of clay presented inside the exhibit (Photo Sabine Klocke-Daffa)

### 3.2 Challenges

The project faced a number of challenges that are unknown in regular academic routine and are not even dealt with in curricular requirements or regulations.

#### Get organized

Cross-cultural training started right from the beginning because of the interdisciplinary approach: anthropologists meeting designers in class turned out to be a special kind of a “clash of cultures”, each adhering to their own values, needs and claims. It took more than six months until the different expectations could be overcome and melt into a new way of co-presentation. So instead of “cultures are complex wholes and need to be presented in a complex way” (anthropologists) versus “complex issues need to be reduced to the essentials” (designers) the motto of the exhibition became “large issues presented in small examples” shown in a materially reduced, but not minimal, presentation.

#### Appeal to non-professionals

As an anthropological exhibition, it had to be conceptualized for a non-anthropologically trained public—as could be expected in a Museum of

Natural History. So the basics of anthropological training—such as kinship terms, socio-cosmological structures or economics systems—could not be taken for granted and needed explanation.

### Be exciting

The public had to be addressed in a way that was attractive enough to make the exhibition interesting. In the end, we decided to focus on polygyny as one of many possible forms of marriage and animism as a religious concept to deal with the supernatural.

### Make it short

Nobody actually wants to read long explanatory texts. This turned out to be one of the really hard tasks.

### Inspire

Inspire children and adolescents with interesting stories such as the role of ancestors, sacrifices at a shrine, growing up with several dozens of sisters and brothers.



Fig. 4 – Site of the exhibit: Sacrifice at a shrine for the ancestors (reconstructed) (Photo Romy Seidler)

The final concept was quite ambitious to realize for the group—all except one being unfamiliar with the organization of exhibitions. It included: a 600 square-meter presentation showing material objects and photographs as well

as new videos; a catalogue comprising detailed information for the media; and a kids' tour questionnaire. Special offers were made for school classes of different grades and an inauguration gala had to be organized. All this would not have been possible without public and private sponsoring, which had to be secured.



Fig. 5 – Market stall with original items (Photo Romy Seidler)

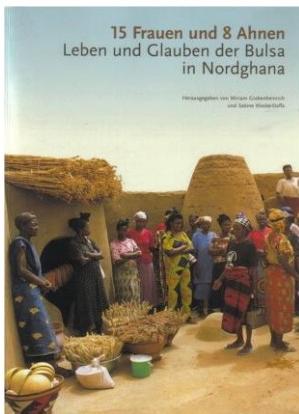


Fig. 6 – Cover of exhibition catalogue (Photo Miriam Grabenheinrich, Design Aufdemkamp)

Each of these items was elaborated by a special student task force supervised by staff members as well as external experts. It was agreed that not more than four aspects of Bulsa culture would be presented, featuring traditional

as well as modern life: life in a Ghanaian savanna compound; agriculture and handcrafts as basic economic activities; social life and religion; markets, migration and social change.

### 3.3 Issues for discussion and special offers

The project tackled a number of questions using anthropological data to exemplify what it means to live under social, religious, economic and environmental conditions which are quite different from our own. It also intended to initiate discussions about alternative concepts of social life and religious beliefs, trying to make them understandable rather than boosting stereotypes of the exotic “other”. It was further to be stressed that the Bulsa are a contemporary society facing modernity and technical changes, just as other societies. As many of them are living as migrants outside of Ghana or even outside of Africa, the biographies of two persons who lived in Germany were taped and presented by audio processors within the exhibition. Last but not least, it was to be explained what anthropologists do by tracing back research among the Bulsa over the past thirty years in which the exhibited objects had been collected. This mixture of a *general overview* of life in a savanna society and *individual stories* proved to be quite successful. It provided visitors with basic information of what life is in this part of the world, but gave it a very personal touch. Children and adolescents found it most fascinating to meet a family of almost seventy people, with only one father, many mothers and enough siblings to form about five football teams.

Among the topics thus selected were:

“Everyday life of a man”—Presenting Mr. Anamogsi, compound head and wealthy farmer with fifteen wives, about fifty children, and eight ancestors of his patrilineage to care for. The questions to be answered in this section were: How do people live in a polygynous society, and what kind of special responsibilities does this man have?



Figs. 7–8 – Mr. Anamogsi, head of compound, husband of fifteen wives, father of about fifty children and descendant in a line of eight ancestors (Photos Miriam Grabenheinrich)

“Everyday life of women” —Featuring the house of a woman and her private belongings; showing pictures of women in a polygynous marriage. The questions in this section to be answered were: How do women live in polygyny, and what do they have to say about it? Why would they prefer to be a wife among many rather than being a single wife?



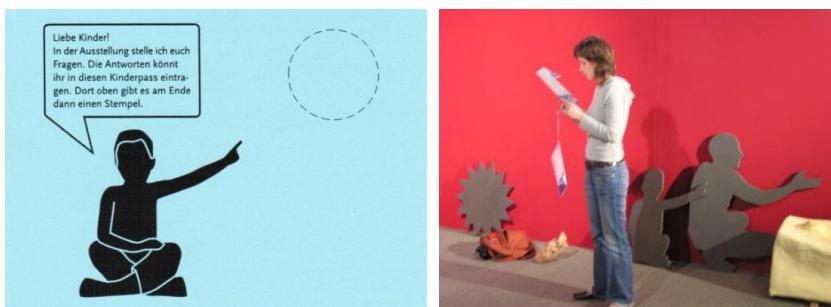
Figs. 9–10 – Woman and children in a Bulsa compound (Photos Miriam Grabenheinrich)

“The life of children” – Presenting pictures and videos about the compound children who grow up with one father and many mothers, living among many sisters and brothers. The questions to be answered here were: Why do the Bulsa prefer to have many children? Is there a meaning to it other than economic considerations?

“Living with the dead” – Animism and ancestor worship were addressed and what it means to live with the dead as members of the community, showing sacrifices to the ancestors and the person who is qualified for this job, the diviner. The questions to be answered were: What is the significance of the deceased? Why are they considered to be part of the life of the living?

“The work of anthropologists” – Last but not least, anthropology as a profession was to be presented and what it means to do fieldwork.

“Specials for kids” – A tour guide for young children with questions about details of the exhibition was added. Answers could be found in each section as kids carefully followed the path. Two educational workshops for children were conceptualized, from grade conceptualized for: “Bulsa – Savanna Life” (children grades 4–5), featuring family life in a compound; and “Calabashes and Maggi spice – Tradition and Modernity among the Bulsa” (children and adolescents grades 5–7).



Figs. 11–12 – Kids' tour guide with symbol to be found inside the exhibition. Student during setup (Photos Romy Seidler)

## 4. Conveying anthropological knowledge

Talking about anthropology in practice and how to convey complicated scientific knowledge to the public—more precisely to children and adolescents—demands that we answer three questions: How can anthropology be put to practice dealing with children and adolescents in intercultural learning? Why is intercultural competence necessary? What does intercultural competence demands us to do?

### 4.1 Anthropology in practice—Icultural learning

One possibility to bring anthropology to practice and to a broader public audience with a special focus on children and adolescents is to participate and elaborate special offers in intercultural learning. This has been defined as “the understanding of different systems of orientation and its adjustment to one’s own thinking and acting” (Thomas, 1988, p. 83), to cite only one of many definitions from the scientific literature. What makes this definition of special importance for applied anthropology is the option of agency<sup>9</sup>: it implies that it is not sufficient to get some information about different societies with their particular cultures—information we get through the media every day. Similarly, it is not enough to get to know persons with different cultural backgrounds or get in contact with certain objects of their culture—a situation we find in schools, neighborhoods and during vacations. In addition, intercultural learning implies understanding different ways of life, norms and value systems and *transforming this knowledge into appropriate action* when dealing with people of different cultural backgrounds. This does not mean renouncing one’s own values and accepting anything others do unquestioned, but it does demand accepting other ways of life as equal to own and changing perspectives.

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<sup>9</sup> Agency (German: *Handlungsmacht*) is defined as the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices; cf. Barker, 2005, p. 448.

## 4.2 What applied anthropology is good for in intercultural learning

The term *intercultural competence* seems to be a bit strained even before it has been put into effect, but this is really what we have to keep in mind and should aim at continuously: "Intercultural competence is the skill of achieving a maximum of understanding and agreement when dealing with members of different cultures, acquired in a process of learning" (Bertels & Bußmann, 2013, p. 33, translated by the author).<sup>10</sup> Two aspects of this definition must be highlighted:

Intercultural competence requires a learning process and is nothing one could easily memorize; it aims at understanding and agreement. Many misapprehensions could be avoided if other ways of living would be comprehensible. However, this implies the willingness to understand other persons and not only to put one's own ideas across.

Applied anthropology works at the interface of this difficult and time-consuming process of teaching and learning, precisely because it takes both sides into account. Rather than being reduced to interpreting ethnographical facts and working out models of explanations, applied anthropology must go much beyond academic teaching. It aims at putting knowledge into practical instructions and guidance. This requires careful preparation, taking different demands and needs of the public into account. Most important, it urges anthropologists to assume an unequivocal position—which is far from the normal situation of scientists keeping on neutral ground.

## 4.3 What intercultural competence demands us to do

There are a great many scientific approaches to intercultural learning from different disciplines. Educational theory might be well ahead of anthropology as far as its methods and aims are concerned. But whatever is considered to be the appropriate approach, intercultural learning and achieving

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10 "Interkulturelle Kompetenz ist die in einem Lernprozess erreichte Fähigkeit im ... Umgang mit Mitgliedern anderer Kulturen einen möglichst hohen Grad an Verständigung und Verstehen zu erreichen."

competence to deal with members of different cultural groups does always imply *changing perspectives*, trying to look at the world through the eyes of others. This is not an easy thing to do considering how difficult it is to even accept different points of opinion within one's own culture—even more so when dealing with different beliefs and value systems. So we are facing what might be called the *intercultural triangle*: intercultural learning aims at understanding different systems of orientation and its adjustment to one's own thinking and acting. Only if this is accomplished can intercultural competence be enacted; but both require the will to change perspectives.

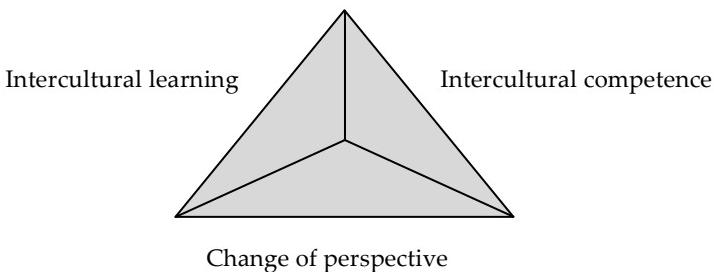


Fig. 13 – The intercultural triangle

Applied anthropology is able to accomplish these aims, but what is needed is a set of transparent, well-prepared data presented in such a way that it meets the audience where it is and not where scientists want it to be. Children and adolescents want anthropological data to be presented in fascinating stories that show them what the world has to offer and that there is more than one way of looking at it.

This is quite an arduous endeavor which might imply critical reflection of one's own positions, abandoning well-known stereotypes serving to make the world easily understandable. The opportunities, however, are manifold: intercultural competence is a necessary premise in a globally consolidating world and “sells” in many ways. Children should become aware of the fact that cultural diversity is not a menace to their future, but a sign of wealth. It necessitates giving others a chance to be different.

	Challenges	Chances
a)	Intercultural learning is arduous	Intercultural competence “sells” in a multicultural environment
b)	Critical reflection of own position queries own values	Cultural diversity signifies wealth and is not a threat to individual or collective identity
c)	Reducing stereotypes makes life more complicated	Acknowledge that others have a right to be different and need not be judged by stereotypes

## 5. Prospects and limits

The project “My dad has fifteen wives and eight ancestors to care for” clearly brought to light the chances and problems of an attempt to convey anthropological knowledge to children and adolescents. Incorporating this transformation process into academic teaching is certainly a special challenge and does have certain limits. One is that students and teachers must accept that they are not professionals when it comes to presentation techniques, media competence or other skills. The challenge which is much more difficult to overcome is that of bringing scientific knowledge into line with public demands. Working *in public* implies working *for the public*—not for a scientific audience.

What we should keep in mind is the fact that “the anthropological gaze” we are so familiar with and take so much effort to learn in university courses is nothing the public is used to. Anthropologists’ excitement over the worldwide wealth of cultures, over different systems of kinship, religion, economics and politics, over values and norms or hierarchy and egalitarianism might not be shared and leave non-anthropologists confused (which is not to say that the experience of diversity is never confusing to anthropologists). Making anthropology popular needs a reduction of complexity, and this might not be easy to achieve. People usually want simple answers to complicated realities—which most often we cannot provide. So whenever there is an information request from the side of the media asking to explain a culturally complex cultural pattern such as polygyny or animism—“please tell me

in five sentences” – we will have to surrender. We cannot explain a complex whole in five sentences – and we can't always make it short.

But what we can do is to present what we have and take public needs into account. Conveying anthropological knowledge, and more precisely to a young audience, in this manner forces anthropologists to reduce large issues to small examples and make complex matters understandable. To that end it is necessary to confine the aim to what is feasible, lower expectations and meet the audience where it stands: with its own problems, interests and experiences, and invited to bring in its own views. It can be done, but it needs special training of students and the feedback of practicing anthropologists as outside specialists. What applied anthropology has to strive for and what students need to learn is to translate scientific knowledge into a language which the public understands. It might not be the only step but certainly the first one for the promotion of tolerance and the appreciation of the wealth of cultures. A publicly relevant anthropology has a lot to offer in achieving this goal, but it needs to leave the ivory tower of science and break fresh ground.

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# Begging—Between Charity and Profession: Reflections on Romanian Roma's Begging Activities in Italy<sup>1</sup>

**Cătălina Tesăr – National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest,  
Romania**

## Abstract

Most people associate begging with charity, i.e. getting something for nothing. This chapter proposes that begging is seen by its practitioners as a kind of work which requires the bodily training and attention. I draw this conclusion from my observation and participation in begging activities carried out by a family of Romanian Gypsies in Northern Italy. Firstly, I will give an overview of Romanian Gypsy populations and their mobility to Italy. Then I shall introduce the people of my study, the Cortorari. They hold a specific view of personhood as enmeshed in kinship relationships. Persons live up to a moral code buttressed by idioms of shame and honour. These values underwrite the realms of gender, clothing and economics. A specific dress together with a strict division by gender of the economic activities and certain behaviour towards money lie at the core of the morality of kinship. When they go begging,

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1 The research for this article was made possible by a Wadsworth International Fellowship offered by the Wenner-Gren Foundation (for doctoral studies at U.C.L. between 2007–2011). I completed the final stage of the writing of this article as a postdoctoral fellow at the ISPMN within “The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe: Causes, effects and future engagement strategies”, a project funded by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme under the call on “Dealing with diversity and cohesion: the case of the Roma in the European Union (GA319901).” I am thankful to Elisabeth Tauber and Dorothy Zinn who welcomed me to their seminar series at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and encouraged me to contribute to this volume. To Elisabeth Tauber I am grateful for moral support during fieldwork, inspiring continuous conversations over the shared experience of begging, and for precious advice in her capacity as editor of the book. The two anonymous reviewers’ comments on a previous draft were decisive for the final form. I am indebted to the Cortorari for having widely opened their hearts to me, and especially to the family I accompanied begging for having affectionately looked after me during our precarious stay in Italy.

Cortorari renounce their customary dress for worn-out blackish clothing, believed to be characteristic of a generic beggar. By so doing, they symbolically renounce their ethnic identity and almost all moral values embedded in it. Cortorari make a qualitative difference between home and abroad: moral sentiments define the first and economic exchanges, the latter.

This chapter tackles a sensitive issue for the Italians: the so-called “Gypsy problem” which has been sweeping the country in the last decade. More specifically, it makes reference to Romanian Gypsies who have been portrayed as thieves and criminals by the mass media and have been the target of violent assaults over the *campi nomadi* (campgrounds for nomads). The representations we have of these Gypsies are more often than not moulded by journalists’ and politicians’ discourses, the former policing the distance between them and their subjects by means of the camera lens and written texts, and the latter by means of electoral campaigns. The image of Gypsies that reaches the folk associates this population with ideas of menace to the public order and security, defilement of the urban landscapes and threat to the individual well-being. This is an account of Gypsies that depersonalizes them and turns them into a lump of malevolence floating over us. Moreover, it discourages us from inquiring into the life projects of these people: who are they, where do they come from, and where are they headed to?

Here I do not address all Gypsies together; I focus on a peculiar group of Romanian Gypsies, the Cortorari, whom I have known for a dozen years. I carried out eighteen months of fieldwork among them between 2008 and 2010. I did this by participating in their everyday life and subsequently learning their language. People belonging to this group often travel to Italy with only one purpose: to engage in begging. In 2009, I accompanied one Cortorari family, a husband and wife in their thirties and their fifteen-year-old son, on one of their begging trips to Northern Italy. During our one-month stay in Italy, I myself engaged in begging activities. All of the knowledge I have of begging, upon which this article draws, is derived from the process of learning to beg which I underwent and from the observations I could make both of the family I accompanied and other Cortorari we encountered abroad.

The main question I raise here is: how do the Cortorari conceive of begging? In order to answer it, I shall introduce some of the most important elements of the cultural repertoire of this group. How does it happen that we find Gypsies begging in the streets on our way to school or work? Most of us have walked past them in the streets. Some of us have given them a penny or might have ignored them altogether. We might have felt pity towards them or we might have felt annoyed by their presence. Regardless of the different feelings we experienced, we definitely thought that beggars gained their living by other means than working. Our folk understanding opposes begging to work, and an explanatory dictionary of any language will serve to exemplify. The definition found under the entry “work” in the Oxford dictionary states: “be engaged in physical or mental activity in order to achieve a result.” Conversely, “to beg” defines as “to ask for food or money as charity” or “as gift.” We discriminate between these two activities; we positively conceive of the first as attaining resources through effort, and of the latter, as getting something for nothing. Surprisingly enough, we will see that Gypsies who practice begging equate this activity with work.

Other researchers have advanced similar arguments about Gypsies notions of begging. Tauber (2000, 2006, 2008), who worked with north Italian Sinti, shows that begging is a woman-centered productive activity. She further demonstrates how for Sinti women the meanings of begging go beyond the mere economic exchange and express a way of being-in-the-world. In contradistinction with Tauber’s Sinti, the people of my study engage in begging regardless of their gender identity. Moreover, unlike the Sinti women who go begging from and selling to their Italian neighbors, the Cortorari practice begging almost exclusively abroad. Carrying out such an activity at home, where they strive to forge an image of themselves as good traditional Gypsies who derive their livelihoods from copper manufacture, is considered shameful. Piasere (1987) argues that for the Xoraxane Gypsies that he studied in Verona in the late 1970s, begging was a mode of production through gathering. Begging “requires no particular effort, nor sophisticated knowledge” for the Xoraxane Gypsies (*idem*, p. 114). As opposed to them, the Cortorari consider the art of begging to require specific skills and knowledge and peculiar bodily techniques that people can learn. In a later

article, Piasere (2000) maintains that Gypsies imagine begging as a mercantile activity, and it is in this point that my argument converges with Piasere's. For my demonstration, I shall use some of the data I have already published in Romanian (cf. Tesăr, 2011).

## 1. Romanian Gypsies: an overview

Romania is the country with the largest concentration of Gypsy population in Europe: it thus hosts a big variety of Gypsies. They do not imagine themselves as one and the same people, and they acknowledge substantial cultural differences among themselves. Some might be closer in their lifestyle to their Romanian neighbors than to other Gypsies. Some live scattered amongst Romanians with whom they might conclude mixed marriages. Still some others live in closed communities and intermarry. For the outsider, Romanian Gypsies fall within two major categories: so-called "traditional" Gypsies, and so-called "assimilated" Gypsies. The former can be distinguished by their outfits, and women stand out with their long, colorful skirts, and long, plaited hair on their backs. "Traditional" Gypsies usually speak among themselves their own language, which is called Romani, in addition to the Romanian language that they learn in school. They are rather adamant about their own cultural repertoire, and I shall discuss elements of their culture later this chapter. The "assimilated" Gypsies resemble Romanians in their appearance, and most of them are not speakers of Romani language. Not even the so-called "traditional" Gypsies are a homogenous population: they belong to a host of communities which customarily had specific occupations. One can thus distinguish between coppersmiths, tinkers, spoon-makers and so on. This diversity is further complicated by the economic status of different Gypsy populations who, similarly to their Romanian neighbors, can either live in extreme poverty or be extremely wealthy. This heterogeneous nature of the Gypsy population is the result of their long and troubled history living in Romanian territory, which is further mapped onto the internal values that fashion self-representations of the Gypsy group one belongs to as culturally superior to another. Through time, on one hand,

they have been influenced by broader political-economic and social changes; on the other hand, they have remained different, in an allegedly paradoxical manner. In the course of history, they have juggled different standings in society, all of them equally marginal. They reached the territory of present-day Romania in the fourteenth century<sup>2</sup>, and they immediately became serfs to landlords and monasteries. Once freed as late as the nineteenth century, some of them were forcibly turned into peasant farmers, while others were tolerated as tent-dwellers who provided services for the settled population, within clearly defined areas. Later on, during the Second World War, the latter were sent, along with the Jews, to the deportation camps only to become, upon their return, the target of the communist measures of assimilation. Gypsies' native language, Romani, has several dialects but its speakers can understand each other regardless of the dialect differences. "Romani" is derived from the noun *rom*, which cumulates several meanings: man, husband, married man who has begotten children, and person who belongs to a Gypsy group. In their own language, Gypsies call themselves *roma* (plural of the noun *rom*) which loosely translates as "our own people", or "we, the human beings". They call all non-Gypsies *Gaže*, which means non-Roma, and thus "less than human beings"<sup>3</sup>. The denomination of "Gypsies" was attributed by non-Romani speakers.

## 2. Contemporary European mobility of Romanian Gypsies

In the last decade, Romanian Gypsies have had a disruptive presence throughout Europe, and Italy was by far the country in which the Gypsies' presence became the most salient. In order to understand why this is so, I shall discuss few structural issues which shape Romanian Gypsies' mobility. First, Gypsy migrations are intimately connected with ethnic Romanians'

<sup>2</sup> According to linguistic evidence, Gypsies migrated from India between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries (cf. Matras, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> In applying a specific denomination to other people than their own, Gypsies are not unique. An example comes to my mind: the denomination of *Goy* that Jews give to non-Jews.

mobility. Secondly, both ethnic Romanian and Gypsy migrations are intimately related to the transformations of the Romanian state after the fall of Communism.

Until 1989 Romania had a state-planned economy which, though it ensured a high rate of employment, was nonetheless characterized by a shortage of consumer goods. Industry and collective farms were the only fields of employment. The population experienced the rationing of goods produced primarily inside the country. The flow of people over borders was banned and so was the flow of icons of prosperity and affluence. The breakdown of Communism brought about a long privatization process which included the dismantling of factories, thus the ensuing high unemployment, and the liquidation of collective farms, entailing the widespread practice of subsistence agriculture, and a general shortage of money. The service economy started flourishing, yet the ex-workers and collective farm peasants were ill-suited for it. People thought of a resolution to this plight through the crossing of the country borders which had recently opened. At first, Romanians smuggled petty goods, cigarettes, alcohol, jeans and gold—to give only a few examples—from and into the neighboring countries: Turkey, Poland, Hungary, etc. Later on and with more intensity after 1994, Romanians reached the countries of Western Europe, where they looked for jobs. In 2002, when tourist visas were no longer required, even more Romanians arrived in Western Europe. The year of Romania's accession to EU, 2007, brought new migrants in Western Europe. Italy was, along with Spain, amongst the favourite destination countries of Romanian migration for several combined reasons: the Italian language is close to Romanian and easier to learn; there was a high demand of irregular labour tacitly encouraged by the state; Italians entrepreneurs started developing businesses in Romania establishing thus contacts with locals, etc.<sup>4</sup> Romanian Gypsies were part of these mobility trends, and ethnographies of both Romanians and Gypsies migration show how locality might be more important than ethnicity in the decision regarding their destination country. In other words, ethnic Romanians and Gypsies from the same home town or village have

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4 For a detailed analysis of Romanian migration to Italy, cf. Cingolani, 2009.

usually migrated to the same country and even locality (cf. Cingolani, 2011).

Here, however, Romanians and Gypsies are left with different opportunities for employment or housing. As in Romania, in Italy Gypsies have fewer chances than Romanians to find a job. Moreover, they are more likely to choose to live together in campi nomadi than to spread themselves in flats scattered through a town. They do so because of various reasons, and I shall mention only a few of them. Firstly, most Gypsies place great value on kinship ties and believe that relatives alone can guarantee one's needs of security and comfort. Secondly, they cannot afford to rent flats<sup>5</sup>. The economic activities Gypsies take up in Italy are as varied as the numerous groups to which they belong: some of them practice scrap-metal dealing, others might get involved in informal commerce, and still others might practice begging (cf. idem.). The remainder of this chapter will focus on the practice of begging, as carried out by some of the Cortorari Gypsies.

### 3. Introducing the Cortorari

Just across the Carpathian Mountains, which cut off the historical region of Walachia from Transylvania, lies a plateau at the geographical heart of Romania. Here, scattered across several villages, lives the population of Cortorari, more often than not in compact neighbourhoods situated on the periphery of the respective villages. Even if they can live as far apart as a three-hour drive—at the most—, the people known as Cortorari by the Romanian inhabitants of the area consider themselves relatives of different degrees of closeness. The majority of my fieldwork was carried out in one specific village. It has the greatest concentration of Cortorari and is regarded as their headquarters. At times I travelled accompanying my Cortorari friends to other villages to visit their relatives, and I spent short periods of time with them. Although the findings of my research rely on close knowledge of Cortorari from one particular village, I do not hesitate to generalize and use these findings to account for all people

<sup>5</sup> The kind of housing available in migration countries, as well as the duration of the intended stay could also account for the Gypsies' choices in terms of residence. For example, eastern Slovakian Roma who migrated to the UK live in flats (Grill, 2012).

known as Cortorari. They all share the same conceptions of relatedness and personhood which are central to making Cortorari different from other Gypsies. The denomination of *Cortorari* derives from the Romanian noun *cort* which translates as tent. Thus *Cortorari* would literally translate as Tent-Dwellers. This is a denomination given by Romanians to the population of Cortorari who used to live in tents until the late 1950s. There is not a word homologous to *Cortorari* in the Cortorari's language. Cortorari call themselves Roma *romane*, which would translate as real Roma or true Roma. Before the advent of Communism in Romania, Cortorari were semi-nomadic. They had their tents set up on the environs of the villages where they reside today. They travelled to the neighbouring villages for economic purposes. Men were coppersmiths, and they used to manufacture copper pots, especially stills, that were needed in peasant households. Women procured produce for daily meals from peasants, through door-to-door visits wisely performed as the offering of services, such as palmistry and card reading, and the beseeching of pity<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, Cortorari kept animals by their tents: women raised pigs and men horses. Cortorari mobility, like that of other itinerant Gypsies, was limited to the area in which they kept their tents set up. Shortly after the Second World War, Cortorari were forcibly sedentarized. The new communist regime thought to improve the welfare of Gypsies by impelling them to buy houses and to take care of their personal hygiene. Old people still remember how men had their hair and beards trimmed and how children were dragged to schools. When this happened, Cortorari had just returned from the deportation camps in Transnistria where they had been taken during the Second World War<sup>7</sup>. Cortorari embraced the forced sedentarization both because, some old people confessed, it gave them the chance to "get in line with the world," and because it could prevent eventual further expulsion into concentration camps<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Cortorari gloss these activities specific to women as *ža gavendar*, approx. "to roam the villages (as if aimlessly); to go around villages". Even if such activities resemble begging (*manglimos*), they are not conterminous with it, given that they only provide for subsistence, unlike begging which is carried out for accumulation. Nowadays only rarely does a woman *ža gavendar* as this is seen as rather degrading and contemptible.

<sup>7</sup> For the deportation of Romanian Gypsies, cf. Achim, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> In Romania, one criterion in the selection of Romany populations which were deported to the concentration camps was their dwelling, i.e. tents as opposed to houses.

No matter how successful Cortorari have been in adjusting their lifestyle to house dwelling, they have nonetheless kept their cultural distinctiveness and have never turned into peasants. They managed to evade Communist assimilationist measures which aimed at including them into the socialist labour force<sup>9</sup>, and they tacitly carried on their old economic activities<sup>10</sup>, divided by gender, as they were. After the fall of Communism, the demand for copper manufactured objects decreased. Cortorari thus had to look for new economic opportunities, and they found one in begging abroad, in countries of Western Europe. When they are not abroad begging, Cortorari men take great pride in copper manufacture, while women, in pig husbandry. Yet these domestic activities hardly provide for their subsistence.



Fig. 1 – Cortorari man working on a copper still (Photo Eric Roset)

<sup>9</sup> See Stewart (1997) for a detailed description of communist assimilationist measures towards Hungarian Gypsies and the latter's resilience.

<sup>10</sup> In so doing, they follow the general tendency for self-employment which characterizes Gypsy identity (cf. Okely, 1996, pp. 60ff.).

Cortorari uphold a host of values specific to patriarchal societies: men hold more symbolic importance than women. In public spaces, men's voices take precedence over women's. Women walk behind their men in the streets, their bodies bowing under the loads they carry as they follow the lofty bodies of men, hands in their pockets and hats on their proud heads. It is disrespectful of a woman to pass by a man unless she utters "Turn around." Women are associated with their homes, and men with the space beyond one's home: the pub, the ditches in front of houses, the streets. Here men gather to kill time, while women are expected to be kept busy at home, where they are in charge of domestic chores. The sons are the only ones to inherit the parental house and family valuables. They are responsible for their parents in old age and for arranging their funerals. Upon marriage, women move out of their parental house to live in their husband's domestic units, in which they are gradually incorporated. Cortorari believe that sons alone ensure the continuation of a family which is understood both as biological reproduction and the transmission of prestige and name. Therefore, the lives of both men and women Cortorari are driven by one goal, i.e. to ensure the perpetuation of their family by arranging the marriage of their offspring (cf. Tesăr, 2012).

Cortorari marry exclusively Cortorari; they have never thought of marrying either Romanians or other Gypsies. Here, parents and grandparents arrange their children's and grandchildren's marriage. They do not encourage marriages by free choice and by love, as Western societies do at present. However, the future spouses' opinions matter in the match choices their families make. The conclusion of a marriage does not rely on state or religious authority. Alliances are legitimized by the couple's consummating the marriage and by their extended families' economic exchanges. The wedding publicizes the conclusion of the marriage, which is marked by the deflowering of the bride by the groom. However, the marriage endures only through the birth of offspring to the couple, ideally a son. It entails a series of economic exchanges between the two families, the most noteworthy being the payment of cash dowry by the bride's side to the groom's.

#### 4. What does it mean to be a Cortorari person?

Cortorari believe that identity is transmitted by blood: they assume that only a person born to Cortorari parents can be acknowledged belonging to their people. However, birth alone is not sufficient for qualifying someone as a proper Cortorari. A person is expected to uphold a moral code of conduct in order to be regarded as a complete Cortorari. Expectations of the categories of gender, kinship and age should be observed by one who desires to be acknowledged belonging. Cortorari people should be imagined as an assemblage of moral beings, i.e. persons who follow a behaviour considered to be specific to Cortorari way of doing things, *romanes*, as they call it. The two extreme pillars of moral evaluation are shame (*lajav*) and respect (*pakiv*). In their everyday life, persons may shame themselves in the eyes of the others or may on the contrary command respect from the others, depending on their behaviour. By the same token, they may experience shame as an inner feeling or they may feel pride in regard to their own deeds. What is shameful and what is respectful is continuously negotiated in relation to one's gender and age, and equally to the kinship distance that characterize one's relation with the others. This is so because a person's social identity derives from the qualities of the connections she has with her relatives: a person is conceived as enmeshed in relatedness and at almost no times does one circumvent these relational aspects. One instance in which the idioms of shame and respect are rendered visible, upon which this chapter's discussion ponders, is the realm of clothing.

The Cortorari distinguish themselves from other Gypsies primarily by means of their dress. The typical Cortorari male wears black velvet trousers, flamboyant flowerly shirts and a black velour hat on his head. The typical Cortorari female wears long, colourful, pleated skirts and a headscarf over her long braided hair. Once you get to know Cortorari closer, you understand that their dress bears more meanings than the mere ethnic identification which strikes the outsider. Among the Cortorari, dress—which changes with age—is seminal in the definition of moral persons. I shall exemplify this with women's clothing. Like other Gypsies, the Cortorari consider women's lower body to become polluting once women start menstruating (cf. Okely,

1996; Sutherland, 1986). Menstruation marks for women the transition from girlhood to adulthood. In their early ages, girls wear trousers, the same as boys do. When they approach puberty, girls start wearing the typical Cortorari skirts, which are made in two pieces: an apron (*šurta*) and a skirt (*rokia*), both vividly colourful, plaited on a string, hanging down to the ankles. The apron is tied in the front and the skirt in the back, around the waist. The apron is thought to keep at bay women's polluting capacities which become active with the first menarche. Once they become sexually active, women should keep not only their lower body covered in clothing, but also their upper body. They should wear long-sleeved blouses that cover the neck well, otherwise they would be accused of a shameful behaviour. It is shameful for women to reveal their legs, ankles or arms in the presence of men in public spaces. Yet this ideal behaviour becomes more relaxed in the private space and in the presence of close relatives. If a thirty-year-old woman would never dare to wear a low-necked blouse when in the street under the public eye, she would carelessly wear such a garment at home, in the presence of her husband (cf. Sutherland, 1986, p. 266). Likewise, when she grows old and reaches menopause, a woman becomes oblivious of the length of her clothing. Men show equally different attitudes with respect to clothing in public and private spaces. The hat a man wears signals his inclusion into manhood: he belongs to the category of men who are married and have either begotten offspring or should do so soon. By wearing the black hat, a Cortorari man shows respect to his Cortorari male peers and equally to older Cortorari women. Furthermore, he commands respect from the others, women included. Yet, when a Cortorari man steps over his home's threshold, he emphatically takes off the hat which makes him sweat under the hot summer sun. By so doing he does not jeopardise his social standing, which would be the case in public spaces.

Being a Cortorari person thus means upholding a set of moral prescriptions in everyday life, and dress counts among the most salient of these. It both distinguishes Cortorari from Gaže and other Gypsies, and marks distinctions of age and kinship distance within the Cortorari world.



Fig. 2 – Cortorari women chatting (Photo Eric Roset)

## 5. Cortorari on the move: rituals of mobility<sup>11</sup>

If one pays a visit to the Cortorari in their village at any given time of the year except the Orthodox Christmas and Easter holidays, one discovers that the majority of the adult men and women are abroad. Poland, France, Greece, and Germany were among the destination countries, with Italy being the most popular at the time of my fieldwork. There were only mothers with toddlers, young couples without offspring and sick people who stayed at home, plus a few strong men who confessed that they were ashamed of begging. Among them, a pair who once tried the experience of going abroad but could not find their way there, got lost, and reasoned that begging was too demanding a business for them.

The Cortorari leave to go abroad in clusters of about three to eight people related either through birth or marriage. Such clusters of people have their

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11 I use here “ritual” in its secular sense, to denote an almost stereotyped sequence of otherwise ordinary activities, which are carried out by any person engaged in mobility, and which symbolically mark the transition from the realm of the home to the realm of the abroad.

own sleeping and begging territories and avoid meeting each other abroad. Even if people do not travel alone, we will see below that begging activities are carried out individually. Moreover, people who leave the village in larger groups do not carry out a communal life abroad. As a general rule, a conjugal family shares a meal and avoids participating in commensality with the others. Back home people participate constantly in commensality: ties between families related by marriage are constructed and cemented through mutual invitations to dinners in the home of one of the parties. Were one of the parties to remove itself from this ritual commensality, the ties between the two families would become loose and the marriage of the young couple would run the risk of being broken off.

Yet abroad all the expectations of the moral behaviour among related people are suspended. Cortorari gloss the place abroad as “[the place where] money is [made]” (*k-al love*) and oppose it, both in their imagination and in their talk, to the home (*kheral*). At home are the good-hearted relatives who participate in each other’s lives; abroad is a dehumanized working place where money talks. Abroad, *p al thema*, people’s supreme aim is to make money, and they make it by means of begging. The notions of home and abroad which cover spatial dimensions are thus associated with different moralities. Abroad means the suspension of the communitarian life carried out at home whereby persons’ behaviour is expected to follow strict norms. Even the denominations used for work at home and abroad respectively are different. Cortorari oppose in their talk *kerel buti* (manual labor)—such as male copper handwork or female pig husbandry—carried out in the confines of the household and primarily for subsistence, to *munca* (the work) of begging (*manglimos*) which allows for the accumulation of wealth.

The transition from the positively, i.e. morally valued, space of the home village to the neutrally valued space of abroad is done through some secular rituals that I will discuss in this section. For their begging enterprises, Cortorari renounce their traditional dress and put on worn-out blackish clothes believed to be typical of a generic beggar. By changing their specific dress with the beggar’s shabby clothes, Cortorari symbolically play down a conception of the person as self-enmeshed in relationships, at the expense of bringing to the fore a conception of the person detached from interconnect-

edness. Abroad, not only is the traditional dress renounced, but also a whole moral code upheld at home which place the relational concepts of respectability (*pakiv*) and shame (*lajav*) at the core of personhood.

Even if the Cortorari are always on the move, always coming and going from abroad, I hardly ever saw one dressed up as a beggar throughout my stay in the village. Cortorari put on their beggar outfits before living the village. They arrange with the car driver to pick them up in front of their houses so that can avoid walking dressed up in black from head to toe in the village. The beggar clothing entails the removing of colourful garments, i.e. men's shirts and women's skirts, and their replacement with blackish rags. The Cortorari's appearance in black is transient and quiet. It is perceptible only for the few minutes that a person needs to walk the distance from the door-step of her house to the car that drives her away.

Changing the so-called "traditional" dress for the begging clothes is a ritual any Cortorari undertakes before leaving for abroad. It is mandatorily accompanied by a washing up of the body. It usually takes place half an hour to one hour before the arranged time of departure. Nobody leaves before washing his body, because in most cases there will be no more baths abroad, irrespective of the length of one's stay. From the family I accompanied begging, I learnt that there are several reasons for not taking a bath abroad. They believed that a stinky body was specific of beggars who would allegedly transmit ideas of homelessness through their odour. To their minds, one's unkempt look attracts money<sup>12</sup>. The family's begging activities lasted from sunrise to dusk. If one took a one-hour break for a bath, one would have been left with less lucrative time. Less time left for begging equates fewer chances to earn good money. Back in the village, cleanliness and a nice body odour are moral standards that people are expected to live up to. Here, dirtiness and any stench are considered the extremes of a wrong conduct. A person who stinks is avoided and is gossiped about. Conversely

<sup>12</sup> Not all Cortorari endorse these ideas. We will see later that the performance of begging is highly personalised. It is with this in view that I take at face value the statements of some Cortorari who confided that they maintained a clean and tidy appearance when begging (cf. Okely, 1996, ch. 3). Yet such cases did not belie the ritual of the bath before the departure.

most of the Cortorari abroad appreciate bodily stenches. Cortorari who go begging wash their bodies before leaving for abroad and before leaving to return home. By so doing, they maintain different standards in relation to the personal hygiene at home and abroad. The ritual washing of the body before leaving home is done with the participation of close relatives<sup>13</sup>, who come to greet person who goes away.

## 6. The work of begging

At the time of my fieldwork in Italy, Cortorari used to keep their presence invisible both for local authorities and for other Gypsies. Unlike other Gypsies, they did not live in campi nomadi. They slept in the open, in parks and under bridges, near railways stations and at times, in abandoned houses. Their sleeping places were as transient as their presence in Italy. The Cortorari only became visible, yet undistinguishable from other beggars, in the streets.

A rewarding begging day needed to start early in the morning, because the division of the begging territory was negotiated based on the principle of first come, first served. At 5 a.m. beggars gathered at the railway station of their provisional residential town for their morning coffee. People arrived by turns and briefly greeted those who had already arrived. They quickly turned the topic of their conversation towards their interlocutors' plans for the day. Apparently, it was here at the railway station that the division and distribution of the begging territory was done. Most of the people who arrived early morning at the railway station took a train or bus to the nearby localities where they begged for the day. Yet there were people who came here with no intentions of taking a train or a bus. They gathered for their

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13 Cortorari do not have bathrooms built inside their homes because, similarly to other Gypsies, they believe that the discarded scales of the body and its waste such as faeces are potentially polluting (cf. Okely, 1996, p. 68; Stewart, 1997, pp. 207ff.). Their privies are normally located far at the back of their gardens. For washing their bodies, they use strictly separate basins for women and men. When washing, a person retires to an empty room of the house, away from the sight of the relatives clustered in the parlour.

morning coffee, over which they discussed the chosen begging places for the day. The conversations followed the rules of secrecy. Everyone tried to conceal his/her destination for the day. When two or more individuals met at the same begging place, priority was given to the one who had longer experience in the area. Thus rights of ownership over a begging place were laid in direct ratio with the individual's span of frequentation of the area.

The time a person woke up was an assertion of her determination in earning money. Yet industriousness was not the only ingredient that ensured a successful begging day. Knowledge about the economic potential of different places<sup>14</sup> was equally important in determining someone's gains. This kind of knowledge is acquired in time, mainly through personal begging experience in a place. Among the Cortorari, it is transmitted from person to person, usually within the idiom of relatedness. Every newcomer, as it was the case with me and Šomi, the son of the family I accompanied, becomes an apprentice to an experienced beggar. Neither I nor Šomi had any previous begging experience. In the minibus which took us to Italy, Šomi's parents recounted different encounters with Italian donors in front of the "big church" downtown or on the car park ground of a "supermercato" (supermarket). Their stories abounded in details of the locations mapped onto geographies of lived emotions rather than onto external geographies of the space. Eyes and arms wide open, they would persuade us that good money could be made by the enormous church, next to the park where dogs were walked. Such vague indications, which overlook the geographical coordinates of a place, are useless when it comes to finding your bearings. As a matter of fact, all the parks had a special area designated for walking dogs in the Italian city where we resided. Most of the Cortorari are illiterate and, therefore, will not show you the way around a new place by following the sign posts. Mastery of directions can be achieved only through the transmission of knowledge from the guide to the apprentice. During the first week of our stay in Italy, Šomi and I were steered by his parents to different places deemed by them appropriate for begging. Here, we were left to our own devices, which meant

<sup>14</sup> For example, knowledge of dates when markets are organized in different towns in an area, knowledge of profiles of the clientele of a supermarket, etc.

that we had to come up with individual ways of approaching donors and of begging, while Šomi's parents retired to places wherefrom they could both keep a watchful eye on us and carry on with their own begging activities. From time to time, one of them would spring out of their corner and approach us to whisper to us a short precept, such as to be more assertive with a passer-by who was well dressed. Or, without warning, one of Šomi's parents would jump at a person who walked past us without giving a penny and coax the person into reaching her wallet. During the first week of our stay in Italy, Šomi's parents took us to different places and kept us under surveillance. Afterwards, both I and Šomi were left on our own to find our way around the town and forge our personal way of begging.

Except for the above-mentioned initiation that requires the transmission of knowledge from one person to the other, it is believed that individual begging skills are specific to every person and are acquired through personal experience. To give you an example, communication in the language of the migration country is an important capital that ensures the beggar's success in his productive activity and only experience in migration can improve language skills. Begging styles were different from one individual to another. Both men and women wore black clothes and took up the appearance of the poor, of the deprived. There were two main ways of performing begging: *te phiren* (walking around, either in commercial streets, or touristy places and persuasively asking for money) or *te bešen* (sitting). The posture of the seated body suggested both humiliation and respect for the donors. It was believed that kneeling while begging can bring more gains.

Back home I could often hear the appreciative saying "nobody can emulate the way that one begs." By way of exemplification, a woman proudly explained to me that she didn't need to bend her body for gaining money. Another woman told me that she needed only to kneel without uttering a word in order to make money come to her. It was not until I went begging in Italy that I understood that the art of begging is intimately related to facts of corporeality. Begging is all about impression management. The person who begs tells a story worth of mercy by means of posture, gestures, words. Yet the strength of one's body is seminal for the success of such a story. Fabrication of a begging body is a process that requires training in putting up with

physical pain and in being in control of one's body. For the kneeling posture, one has to support oneself on one's knees for at least three hours. I only managed to maintain this bodily posture for less than one hour and afterwards I had pain in my legs for one week. I was not the only one suffering. For quite a while, Šomi had been complaining of pains in his arms because of twisting them when begging. On top of that, our bodies were exhausted from the lack of proper sleep.

Crafting of the begging body depends on each person's physical ability, as well as on age and gender. The Cortorari keep the begging body distinct from the non-begging body. Cortorari abroad appreciate humble and bent bodies for their potentials in earning money. At home, straight and healthy bodies are attributes of femininity and masculinity. In order for a person to be morally valued both for the performance of begging and for her conduct at home, one should handle skillfully the transition from a body to the other. Most donors might associate beggars with Gypsies, therefore "ethnicizing" them. Yet the Cortorari believe that they take up a de-ethnicizing appearance when they practice begging. This situation echoes that of the boxers from a black ghetto in Chicago studied by Wacquant (2004). Here men who train their bodies for prize-fighting spectacles—events which are represented by the mainstream audience as race-specific—, believe to undergo a process of "deracializing bodies." Likewise, Cortorari who give up their traditional dress and put on the beggar costume believe that by doing so, they symbolically renounce their ethnic identity. This idea is also transparent in the realm of gender. Back home, men and women undertake different economic activities. By the same token, they are associated with the public the former and respectively the private space the latter. This gendered division of labour lies at the core of Cortorari ethnic identity. Abroad, both men and women engage in begging activities, and by doing so they reverse a customary way of doing things.

Writing about the English Romanies, Okely (1996, ch. 3) notes the practice of changing one's visible identity on the occasion of economic exchanges with Gaže. The author maintains that Gypsies adapt their economic activities to the changing socio-economic conditions of the surrounding environment on grounds of the extensive knowledge they hold of the non-Gypsies and of the

representations the latter have about Gypsies. Sensitive to the external world and its expectations, Gypsies change their appearance when they interact with the Gaže, in such a way that their true ethnic identity appears exoticized, concealed, degraded or neutralized. Likewise, Cortorari conceal their true identity by changing their appearance abroad. Aware of the widespread racism against Romanian Gypsies in Italy<sup>15</sup>, they disguise themselves as de-ethnicized beggars.

## 7. *K-al love: where money is made*

It was at the beginning of our stay in Italy, before I had embodied both the knowledge and skills necessary for either earning money or handling, showing, hoarding, spending, and speaking about it. At about 7 p.m. I was supposed to meet in the park the Cortorari family I was accompanying on their begging ventures. Exhausted after a long “working day” which had started before the sunrise, I first stopped in an internet café and afterwards rushed into a supermarket to get some food for our shared cold dinner. I was impatient to rejoin “my family” and to listen to their stories. As I was to find out, they were even more curious to learn about my day. They greeted me with a straightforward question that I was to hear every single evening throughout our stay: “How much did you make today?” “15 [euro]”, I replied proudly. Not only was I telling them the truth, but I was also content with my gains. Back home, my Cortorari friends had advised me to declare, whenever prompted about daily earnings, around 20 [euro]—a sum which rings plausible for a beginner in the art of begging—while concealing potential bigger earnings.<sup>16</sup> The next question came: “Were you left with 15?” Withholding my confusion, I quickly uttered yes. Other inquiries about my earnings followed, to my mounting consternation. I was challenged to con-

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15 It is beyond the scope of this article to tackle issues of discriminatory attitudes towards Gypsies and of their being the reason for a general moral panic in Europe (cf. Picker & Rocchegiani, 2013; Stewart, 2012).

16 A person’s earnings range from € 20 per day for a beginner to € 100 per day for a “professional” in the art of begging.

fess whether I had exchanged the sum (from coins into paper currency) or not. I offered a detailed itemization of my expenditures, mentioning money spent on food, coffee, Internet, phone calls, etc. Bewildered that at the end of the day, when gains are counted, I was left with only some insignificant spare change, “my family” scolded me for squandering. They concluded that my thrifless behaviour was rooted in my indifference towards hoarding. They reminded me derisively of the job I was after in Italy: I was much more interested—they claimed—in scrutinizing their activities abroad than in making money. Such fieldwork experiences of a clash between the anthropologist’s and the people’s under study different representations of the same social facts—in this case the behaviour towards money—are of paramount importance in directing the researcher’s attention towards the real concerns of his interlocutors. Only after being repeatedly scolded for wasting money, could I conjecture that the work of begging intimated a peculiar attitude towards money, in addition to the bodily performance and discipline that I described in the previous section.

What struck me the most throughout our stay abroad was the very calculating economic behaviour displayed by the Cortorari. While back home the Cortorari regard money as a plentiful commodity, valued for its properties in circulation rather than for its potential for accumulation—a point made equally by Stewart (1994) in relation to the Hungarian Gypsies—, abroad the Cortorari see money as a scarce commodity that people strain to accumulate. At home, the moral evaluation of persons is done according to their disposition to be generous with others, by offering food and drinks to them. Abroad, it is a person’s ability to hoard money that is continuously under evaluation. In Italy, Cortorari engaged in money hoarding at the expense of satisfying primarily body needs such as hunger, sleep, and health. If back home stories that circulate depict abroad (*p-al thema*) as the paradise of cheap fruits and drinks, populated with generous donors, once there, the territory of migration becomes the place where the incentive to earn money rules out eventual prospects of comfort and self-indulgence. Abroad, the Cortorari sleep in the open, scavenge for food and beg for their cigarettes, so that they do not spend a penny of the money they gain. All of it is brought home to be invested on the local marriage market, especially in dowries. Cortorari believe that hoarding behaviour in Italy is peculiar exclusively to them. It is

thus a practice that distinguishes them from other non-Cortorari Gypsies who beg abroad. It is shameful for a Cortorari to spend abroad money gained from begging. Cortorari who stay abroad longer might send parcels with goods for their kinsfolk back home. Yet no money is spent on these parcels, which are usually made from foodstuffs received from charity organizations such as Caritas and electronics and clothes gathered from the garbage bins. Looking at their economic behaviour at home and abroad respectively, one notices that Cortorari make a qualitative distinction between the former and the latter. At home, money contributes to the creation and maintenance of reciprocal relations, based on trust and solidarity—attributes which characterize the morality of kinship. Abroad, money flows across more transitory relations with strangers, with interestedness and anonymity being symptomatic of the weak ties established between beggar and donor, reminiscent of an impersonal market exchange. The two distinct economic behaviours that Cortorari take up at home and abroad, map onto what anthropologists coined as the realm of “community” versus “market” (Gudeman, 2001) or “long term” versus “short term” exchanges (Parry & Bloch, 1989) to distinguish between on the one hand, transactions concerned with the reproduction of relatedness, and on the other hand, transactions concerned with the individual gains that pose a threat to the moral order. As an assertion of their hoarding behaviour, the Cortorari elicit the counter example of the thrifless behaviour taken up by non-Cortorari Gypsies. The latter have become involved in a different form of migration with longer periods spent in Italy. The same as the Cortorari, they mainly practice begging activities abroad. Yet, unlike the Cortorari, most of the time they live in campi nomadi, returning to their home country once or twice a year. The Cortorari believe that the communal life non-Cortorari Gypsies lead abroad prevents them from saving money as they spend it on common meals, men’s playing cards and sharing drinks. Because all these activities require money to be squandered, the Cortorari avoid meeting other Cortorari while abroad and thus refrain from a thrifless behaviour. Even kinship ties seemed to be played down at the expense of money hoarding when, for example, members of the same family were contributing equal amounts of money to a common meal, irrespective of their individual earnings.

We have seen that the Cortorari abroad change their attitudes with regard to dress and to the gendered division of labour. They also change their attitudes with regard to money. At home it is part of the morality of kinship to be generous with your relatives. In their home village the Cortorari organized stalls where they sell copper artefacts. The transactions are concluded under the public eye. When one sells an object, his relatives expect him to offer free drinks to celebrate the transaction. Should one not comply with these public expectations, he would be disregarded and excluded from sociability. At home the Cortorari cannot accumulate money, because they are expected to redistribute any earnings among kin. The realm of women's pig husbandry is a case in point. Women strive to raise a few pigs a year in order to sell the meat. If one slaughters a pig to sell it to non-Cortorari, one's Cortorari relatives would boldly ask for meat. Or, if one expected to sell her pig to a Cortorari person, the latter would bargain for a price below the market. In this way, Cortorari women prove unsuccessful in saving the money they would need to invest in their daughters' dowries. Money made at home cannot be accumulated. Conversely, money which is earned abroad is saved. This is made possible by the distribution of the begging territory. When begging, the Cortorari avoid meeting their fellow Cortorari. Money earned from begging on a daily basis, the spare change, glossed as *lei*<sup>17</sup> or *xurde* (small, by extension: spare change) by the Cortorari has a short-lived existence and is converted in paper currency, euro, at the end of a working day. The paper money saved and voided of any sphere of circulation abroad is brought home where it becomes countable *love* (money) and enters marriage market (cf. Tesăr, 2012).

## 8. Conclusions

Economic activities abroad revolve around a process of symbolic renunciation of ethnicity. I showed that specific to Cortorari are both their "traditional" dress and the gendered division of domestic economic activities whose yields

<sup>17</sup> The Romanian national currency

are redistributed along kinship lines. Abroad, irrespective of their gender, people dress up as beggars and endeavour to accumulate money at the expense of redistribution. Money derived from begging is brought home and invested on the local marriage market. The Cortorari conceive of begging as a profession which provides for the reproduction of their families. Similarly to us, non-Gypsies living by capitalist ethics, who put on smart outfits to go to our jobs, the Cortorari remove their “traditional” dress to go begging. Marx argued that the advent of capitalism brought about the representation of labour as divorced from kinship. In his view moralities that governed the private and domestic domain and the public and economic domain were different (cf. Bloch, 1989, 173). In other words, in the realm of kinship moral sentiments rule whereas in the economic domain pure economic interestedness comes to pre-eminence. The Cortorari’s representations of begging seem to follow similar lines. They conceive of begging as labour, which they associate with an “abroad” in which money talks at the expense of moral values. In contradistinction to abroad, the Cortorari invest in their home village where their economic behaviour is associated with ideas of amity, redistribution, respectability, and care for one’s relatives. The transition from the realm of domestic morality to the realm of abroad, i.e. interestedness, is performed by the Cortorari by means of some secular rituals related to the physical crossing of borders, such as changing of their dress, posture of the body and its hygiene. Our folk understandings of begging associate this activity to the “pure gift” / “unilateral gift” (Godbout & Caille, 1998)—a thing given willingly to someone without expecting any payment in return. Contrary to this shared belief, the Cortorari conceive of begging as work that requires specific skills (articulated in verbal and bodily communication), and peculiar knowledge (such as a mental mapping of the territory compounded by an intuition of its economic potential), as well as specific behaviour towards hoarding and concealing earnings. These skills and knowledge can be acquired by any person, irrespective of her gender and ethnic belonging.

Şomi’s and my experience of initiation into the art of begging is telling. In spite of the fact that I was a Gaže and he was a Cortorari, we both qualified as clean slates in regard to begging when we arrived in Italy. Had it not been for his parents who guided us through the town during the first week of our stay in

Italy, we could not have guessed which the potential places for begging were. Moreover, unaccustomed to sleep deprivation and lacking training in the begging bodily techniques, we both endured physical and at times emotional pain. Over and above, we were both squandering money. Šomi kept his eyes peeled for the most expensive shirts in the shops, while I was spending on phone calls and internet cafes. We both had to forge our own way of begging: Šomi preferred the supermarkets and their car parks, where he would push the customers' trolleys in exchange for small sums of money. In time, he became more daring and talked the customers into giving him larger sums. I chose to sit or stand by churches and on commercial streets holding a written sign, instead of talking to the potential donors. By the end of our stay in Italy, both Šomi and I would lose our bad habit of wasting money and boast, in the evening, about how much "we were left with."

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# Crafting Fair Trade Tourism: Gender, Race, and Development in Peru<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Craft production, fair trade, and tourism have interacted with one another since the mid-twentieth century. In Peru, artisans and aid organizations have sold craftwork for decades through a range of approaches, which include tourism projects and fair trade methods. Certain groups working with crafts in Peru and elsewhere now seek to ensure that fair trade and tourism merge formally. The goal for involved cooperatives, agencies, and organizations is for tourism to follow fair trade principles, primarily in order to assure better income for small-scale artisans, agriculturalists, and herders. In

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addition, proponents intend that what is called “responsible” or, in certain contexts, “fair trade” tourism should help smaller scale producers and laborers gain more equitable and stable relations with consumers and world markets, all without worsening the environment. Although both fair trade and tourism struggle with their own issues of inequality and sustainability, the effort to combine fair trade with tourism nevertheless seems useful to examine as part of public anthropological concerns with conditions of disparity. The potential effects of fair trade tourism, in particular on socioeconomic and environmental conditions among less powerful communities and unequally treated members of those communities, are worth exploration. Based on a review of some of the relevant scholarship, and on material from multiple ethnographic research projects in Peru, this chapter will briefly trace the background and issues of fair trade and tourism as they link together. This chapter also will consider critically some of the problems, and possibilities, of mixing fair trade with tourism and suggest points to consider for the future.

## 1. Introduction

Para que no olviden como preparar los dulces, y para que siguen adelante... [So that they don't forget how sweets are made, and so that they continue to go forward...]<sup>2</sup>

Rosa María<sup>3</sup> sits behind a folding table, under a shade tree at the back of a hotel located on Peru's southern coast. Although within a few meters of the hotel's swimming pool and sunbathing area, Rosa María's table stands off of the pavement, and approaching it requires crossing the hotel's grass-covered yard. To attract hotel guests willing to make that journey, Rosa María has covered her table with a lace-like cloth on which she has stacked her home-made sweets in containers dangling with labels.

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2     Quote from Afro-Peruvian culinary artisan to describe the objectives of her women's cooperative in southern coastal Peru, 2013.

3     The respondent's name has been changed.

These labels display the name of the Afro-Peruvian women's cooperative of which Rosa María is a member. Also on each label is the name and contact information for the European nongovernmental organization (NGO) that supported her group's culinary fair trade enterprise as part of development toward recovery from the 2007 earthquake devastation. When asked, Rosa María expresses pride in the traditional Afro-Peruvian sweets that she makes and sells as well as in the small cooperative with which she works: the quote above is her description of one of the group's objectives.

Behind the hotel, her set up is next to two others that belong to a married couple, of which the man works to sell paintings and the woman jewelery that they respectively have done. Unlike Rosa María, these artisan vendors work without cooperative or other institutional affiliation.

Rosa María and the couple are acquainted from their shared experiences within the circuit of tourist sites and events along the Peruvian desert coast. The efforts of these artisan-vendors, to sell fair trade cooperative products side-by-side with non-affiliated goods while kept off to one side of a much larger scale conventional enterprise, are common to socioeconomic activities worldwide. The fact that, before arriving at her table, customers seeking Rosa María's fair trade culinary crafts must walk through a well-watered grassy green lawn—a surface entirely exogenous to the local desert sands—meanwhile seems both an undermining of fair trade standards of environmental and socioeconomic sustainability and the sort of compromise that frequently appears in fair trade practices.



Fig. 1 – Member of a farming community and Afro-Peruvian cooperative along the southern Peruvian coast selling her traditional home-made sweets using containers and marketing labels provided by the Italian NGO Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI), 2013 (Photo Jane Henrici)

As this ethnographic vignette indicates, fair trade does not form a tidy utopic alternative, either to the dominant economic system or to any mainstream effort at socioeconomic development, poverty reduction, or post-disaster recovery. Extensive studies by anthropologists and others of fair trade in operation have described its inconsistencies and its areas in need of improvement (cf. Jaffee, 2007; Lyon & Moberg, 2010). Among issues of concern: gender<sup>4</sup> and racial and ethnic group inequalities associated with both agriculture and urban work have arisen within fair trade practices. At the same time, labor and environmental protections have not always taken hold (Lyon, 2011; Moberg, 2010; Steinkopf Rice, 2010).

Nevertheless, anthropological and related research also suggests that fair, or “alternative,” trade has helped address inequities in labor relations,

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4 “Gender” refers to perceptions and expectations concerning characteristics and behaviors considered feminine or masculine; gender pertains to female, male, or other persons as well as to unequal relations among them.

environmental conditions, and consumer-producer relations. Although apparently limited in range and duration, and often tempered by new problems such as those mentioned, these results encourage continuing with fair trade if accompanied by efforts to make it better (Biggs & Lewis, 2009; Jaffee, 2007; Lyon, 2011).

Fair trade meanwhile has come to influence a growing range of products, projects, and service sector businesses (Lyon & Moberg, 2010). Among the many industries affected by fair trade is that of tourism (Kalisch, 2011). For its part, tourism—both conventionally commercial and as part of planned development—has long overlapped as an income source with fair trade crafts and foodstuffs through retail and export sales (cf. Henrici, 1999, 2002, 2007b; Little, 2004; Zorn, 2004).

Across Peru, as this chapter briefly will describe, craft producers and piece workers as well as organizations working to help them have responded to drops in tourism and other retail sales with income through exportation, then switched back again to focus on tourism when exports fell. Neither tourism nor exportation alone typically has been sufficient to sustain local households and communities. Many artisan-producers use crafts as a supplement to other ways to feed families. At the same time, farmers, herders, and laborers, and the agencies and organizations working with them seek to avoid losing the helpful added income when conditions change. Moving between tourism, and other forms of selling crafts and services, has been an adaptation that producers and vendors have made.

While fair trade and other crafts have interacted with all types of tourism for decades, the conscious and formal merger of fair trade with tourism is a relatively new in Peru and worldwide. Advocates argue that combining fair trade principles with tourism operations should sustain households and communities better than either fair trade or tourism alone. The combination, enthusiasts claim, also might go beyond other forms of fair trade in response to intersectional<sup>5</sup> gender, ethnic group, and race disparities.

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5 *Intersectionality* is a feminist term as described by Kimberlé Crenshaw, to refer to the interaction among forms of oppression that affect multiple aspects of identity. Characteristics and conditions of discrimination and inequality that affect gender *intersect* with others such as ethnic and race group identity, and age, socioeconomic class, and sexuality (cf. Crenshaw, 1989).

As this chapter will discuss, the joining of fair trade with tourism is important to critically examine as part of public anthropological concerns with conditions of inequality, their effect on socioeconomic and environmental vulnerability and resilience, and possible methods to counter those. Based on an analysis of multiple sources, including ethnographic research in Peru across two decades, this chapter will describe some of the problems and possibilities of mixing fair trade with tourism and suggest directions for future work.

## 2. Fair trade principles and certifications

What is called “responsible,” and in certain contexts developed as “fair trade,” tourism is not yet as formalized as other fair trade activities have become (Strambach & Surmeier, 2013). In contrast, sectors of fair trade outside of tourism have developed complex, if contentious, formal methods to meet and label standards of practice. Fair trade participants, who include such diverse representatives as hillside subsistence pastoralists and transnational corporate executive officers, nevertheless do not all agree about what constitutes fair trade.

Fair trade certification and labeling of both organizations and their goods meanwhile have increased sales. This means that debates about membership, certification, and labeling are relevant to fair trade tourism. Formalizing responsible tourism, and using fair trade labels for its activities and goods, could affect incomes for producer-vendors such as Rosa María.

### 2.1 The power to trade

Fair trade is both a movement for social justice and a network for operation. Many of those involved in the movement and the network strive to have local producer- and laborer-members reach sustainable, and thus more resilient, socioeconomic levels. In general, fair trade seeks to redress structural and systemic imbalances in socioeconomic relations and environmental

conditions, although what that entails and how to do it remain under debate (Raynolds, Murray & Wilkinson, 2007).

In addition, the social justice, aid, development, disaster recovery, and producer-vendor groups involved with fair trade divide over which values and populations are more important. Addressing socioeconomic disparities in gender and racial and ethnic group relations were among fair trade objectives from the start; however, responding to issues of relative poverty and highlighting national or ethnic cultural diversity have tended to take precedence in practice (Steinkopf Rice, 2009).

By the mid-twentieth century, the fair trade movement and network sought to help small-scale producers profit enough to continue making goods and laborers to survive on their wages earned. The nineteenth-century advocacy movement behind the forerunners of the contemporary twenty-first-century network strove to challenge the effects of European colonial exploitation, American slavery, and global worker-producer hardship by means of consumer boycotts, information sharing, and preferential purchasing (Trentmann, 2007). The mid-twentieth-century movement and network sought to help small-scale producers profit enough to continue making goods and laborers to survive on their wages earned. Tactics for reaching these goals included marketing goods at higher prices, subsidizing profits, and shielding incomes from middle merchant or sub-contractor fees (Davenport & Low, 2012; Raynolds, 2012).



Fig. 2 – Traditional fair, for exchanging food for ceramics among those of different communities in the Department of Cusco, Peru, 1984 (Photo Jane Henrici)

Some supporters apparently believe, or at least would prefer, that truly fair trade would allow laborers and producers to sell services and goods directly to final consumers, with no need for middle merchants or retailers (Doane, 2010). Despite that notion, within fair trade activities, thousands of groups now operate as brokers, export-import firms, and retailers—and these include indigenous artisans who market and sell others' wares. Many such groups are incorporated, often for tax and tariff reasons, as "alternative" trading organizations (ATOs).

Although not all ATOs originated as explicitly or even implicitly fair trade, ATOs nevertheless have become critical to fair trade. ATOs vary in their objectives, structures, and methods. Local and regional ATOs seem able to operate with a flexibility sometimes needed in response to, and in spite of, relative inflexibility in the demands made by larger ATOs and foundations (Biggs & Lewis, 2009; Henrici, 2003; LeClair, 2002). At every level, most ATOs take less than conventional profits from sales, accept a range of private and public supports, and reinvest earnings into aid or direct payments for member cooperatives or households (Jones, Smith & Wills, 2012).

During the 1950s–1960s, ATOs were launched to ensure that small-scale producer-members would make profits higher than with conventional sales (Davenport & Low, 2012). Some ATOs sought sustainable income. Other

ATOs sought sales as supplements to farming, fishing, or herding or, to a lesser extent, wage jobs (LeClair, 2002; Steinkopf Rice, 2009; Wilson, 2010).

ATOs have competed, as well as partnered, with both conventional and governmental entities to sell goods through specialty shops, tourist sites, and international export businesses—and that includes across Peru. Studies in Peru also demonstrate that ATOS have provided leadership and career opportunities for women, particularly those from more advantaged socioeconomic and ethnic groups, as well as for men of a range of backgrounds. Yet, the contributions of ATOS have not equally benefitted members and staff of diverse genders, racial groups, or ethnicities. At the same time, ATOS have continued to gain influence since they have become responsible for fair trade certification and labeling (Henrici, 2002, 2003, 2007a; Mariñas Tapia, 2013).

## 2.2 The power to name

Certification and labeling have affected fair trade operations at every level, including that of local craft producers engaged with tourism. As observed elsewhere, with respect to ATO operations among Peruvian handicraft producer-vendors selling to tourists and through export out of small villages and poorer urban neighborhoods, to name or label is an act of power—although one that might not be acknowledged (Henrici, 2003, 2010). Particularly if aimed at redressing social injustices, the power to grant or deny legitimacy, authenticity, rank, or in-group status should be open and subject to outside review by others. However, much of fair trade labeling and marketing have been criticized for operating in secret and seemingly capriciously rather than openly and with consistency (Jaffee, 2009; Lyon & Moberg, 2010). At the same time, labeling by ATOS arguably has fostered fair trade credibility and consumption more than otherwise would have been possible. Moreover, fair trade certification and the provision of recognized labels have enabled goods to be marketed and sold independently of the specified shops and supply chains among consumers that some argue once limited fair trade ATO operations and constrained their member-producers (Davenport & Low, 2012).

Formal fair trade certification is a relatively recent contribution to fair trade operations. In 1988, the Dutch Foundation of Max Havelaar reportedly began to certify products that it assessed complied with specific fair trade standards then created its own label with which to mark—and market—eligible coffee beans sold in the Netherlands. Since that time, fair trade certification and labeling have become bureaucratic. Max Havelaar, Fairtrade Foundation, and TransFair International joined with specialty ATOS called “Labelling Initiatives” (LIs), and various marketing organizations in 1997 to form Fairtrade Labelling Organizations (FLO) (Reed, 2012). In 2004, that FLO divided into two independent units, one for certification support and the other for auditing, and the certification unit was named Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (also FLO). FLO is now the principal source for stamping commodities as fair trade around the world; although primarily working with foodstuffs, FLO also assesses qualifying cotton and artisan-mined gold, and its labels have helped drive marketing and sales for all of these goods (Hilson & Kamlongera, 2012).

Fair trade certification and labeling have helped agricultural goods increase sales, yet not all of the populations involved have benefitted. Reportedly, men typically manage fair trade crops while women are displaced as farmers without new opportunities coming in at equal levels (Lyon, 2011). Seeking certification meanwhile costs producer-vendors money and time, and may pressure cooperatives and other member groups to meet externally set rather than locally guided principles of what constitutes “fair”. Finally, combined with changes among trade agreements and other opportunities that favor certain products over others, FLO labels have encouraged certain agricultural goods to rise relative to crafts within fair trade.

Crafts were central to fair trade at its start and for much of its history. The fair trade movement and network encouraged the overlap of crafts with forms of tourism that were marketed as at least partly educational, cultural, or alternative. International craftwork for tourism and export sales during the second half of the twentieth century became the primary rather than subsidiary activity for a number of families, communities, NGOs, and commer-

cial businesses in various nations including Peru (Cohen, 2000; Henrici, 1999; Little, 2004; Mahoney, 2012; Wilson, 2010; Zorn, 2004). Crafts lacked fair trade certification despite having been part of fair trade from the start.

Craft sales through fair trade and tourism gave new income opportunities to women and men of minority ethnic and racial groups in multiple contexts. ATOs, agencies, and customers nevertheless often treated these household and community members unequally so that disparities appeared or continued. Power imbalances remained part of both fair trade and more conventional craft commerce with respect to gender as well as other intersectional features of identity (Little, 2004; Steinkopf Rice, 2010). As the next section of this chapter will show, such tensions have affected producer-vendors in Peru.

In 1989, the International Federation of Alternative Trade (IFAT) formed in order to bring together small-scale crafts producers with ATOs, and negotiate on producers' behalf with transnational agencies such as the World Trade Organization. In 2004, IFAT created the Fair Trade Organization label for member groups that met the international group's standards. In 2008–09, IFAT became known as the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO), as regional member ATOs took on a greater role in the larger group's governance. The members changed the organization's name in part to show a more deliberate association with fair trade principles and practices (Davenport & Low, 2012).

Meanwhile, WFTO members across continents and hemispheres continued to debate how their association might certify and label craft products, not only groups, to reassert craftwork within fair trade as an income source among poorer producers. Fans of craftwork certification posited that increased and more diversified sales could only benefit greater numbers of producers, including more marginalized segments of populations. Proponents also said that certified craftwork might be even more in line with fair trade principles of sustainability than other fair trade products, if better able to help producers become financially resilient to damages from sudden

fashion shifts among customers and to other fluctuations, and even disasters (cf. Henrici, 2003; Bradshaw, 2013).

Frictions formed between regional and local craft and groups demanding—and even creating—their own labels (Davenport & Low, 2012; Mahoney, 2012). During that same time period, certain fair trade agricultural cooperatives figured out a way to circumvent the increasing costs of obtaining FLO certification, work independently from FLO authority, and claim trust as well as affordability as part of fair trade ethics. These groups formed Participatory Guarantee Systems based on producer-based certifications with local or regional peer reviews (Castro, 2014).

However, other issues beyond certification might have affected lowered sales and status for crafts relative to foodstuffs in fair trade. Shifts in international trade agreements and fashions also affected international craftwork sales during the last part of the 1990s through the first decade of the 2000s. Such changes in turn also related to how smaller scale crafts—in contrast to what is labeled either as fine art or as mass manufacture—tend to be marketed and consumed. Items sold variously as indigenous, authentic, artistic, religious, ethnic, heritage, or traditional form a special challenge relative to foodstuffs for comparative evaluation in terms of quality, methods of production, as well as marketing. Unfortunately, costs for raw materials and labor to make those goods have continued to rise while the items themselves compete with mass-produced wares that might appear similar and be sold as if hand- or home-made (Henrici, 1999, 2007b; Little, 2004; Littrell & Dickson, 2010; M'Closkey, 2010; Wilson, 2010).



Fig. 3 – Trading ceramics for the amount of food that can fill them in the Department of Cusco, Peru, 1984 (Photo Jane Henrici)

Despite such complications, proponents of fair trade certification of crafts asserted that product labeling could help restore if not expand markets for craftwork. Advocates argued moreover that certification and expanded craft sales would help women and other more marginalized producers in particular supplement the subsistence activities that earlier handicraft fair trade could not sustain and that agricultural fair trade did not protect. Primarily—especially if the power to name or label were not controlled exclusively by larger ATOS or the WFTO—craft certification could provide greater local and producer control over the power to sell.

### 2.3 The power to sell

Without product certification and labeling, fair trade crafts working with fair trade ATOS were to be sold only through designated fair trade shops and websites. That limitation reportedly made it even more difficult for fair trade goods to compete with cheaper mass- and machine-made items that might also claim hand-made or traditional cultural origins and social justice objectives (Steinkopf Rice, 2009). In addition, some artisans seemingly found the shop model to be more charity-like than sustainable (Hutchens, 2010). Fair trade labels, advocates argued, would free crafts from all such constraints.

WFTO responded to members' debates surrounding product certification, and to the producer-based certification rebellion against FLO, by creating a Participatory Guarantee System (GS) for crafts in 2011. In 2013, WFTO added a Product Label: member organizations that obtain peer and self-certification through the GS process may earn the WFTO Label for products and services. The WFTO GS Label claims to signify that the designated group operates using fair trade principles, as do its business partners, producer-vendors, and retailers (Castro, 2014).

This WFTO guarantee of the fair trade status of supply chain associates of members, in addition to members and their goods and services, could be a response to concerns about FLO labeling. Although all goods that FLO certifies must meet specific fair trade organizational and processing criteria, the commodities may be produced and sold by for-profit conventional businesses. Increasingly, that arrangement seems to be happening at a mass rather than small community or group scale. The FLO and certain of its LI members, notably former member TransFair USA, have received criticism for providing too much in the form of interaction with conventional commerce and too little in the way of equality and empowerment (Reed, 2012).

For its part, TransFair USA left the FLO in 2011, and the re-named Fair Trade USA continues to grant fair trade labels to products and practices counter to what some consider fair trade principles. In particular, Fair Trade USA has supported estate laborers, and defends doing so with the argument that larger scale producers can be ethical and smaller scale producers exploitative (Raynolds, 2012). As controversial as these points may be, they are useful to consider with regard to fair trade tourism and WFTO and other labeling.

In fair trade, claims to counter socioeconomic inequalities tend to portray those inequalities as between consumers/tourists and producers/locals. The two populations appear within fair trade rhetoric typically without overlap and as if corresponding neatly to the so-called global North and South (Henrici, 2003). Meanwhile, socioeconomic development efforts, even those aimed at humanitarian aid and social justice, tend not to acknowledge their own part in environmental damage (Bradshaw, 2013). Neither fair trade nor

planned development tourism typically recognize, much less explicitly address, socioeconomic inequalities related to gender and minority group identities within and among producer/local households, communities, and nations, while avoiding further environmental harm.

### 3. Tourism and fair trade

[Trabajamos] con los jóvenes del distrito para que se valoran su cultura. [(We work with) the district youth so that they value their culture.]<sup>6</sup>

Fair trade comprises only a relatively limited portion of global commerce, while tourism continues to expand. Women, as well as men from indigenous and mixed ethnic and racial group identities, have increased their participation relative to that of men of colonial ancestry and elite backgrounds after decades of international tourism (Cleverdon & Kalisch, 2000; United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women [UN Women], 2011). At the same time, and as with fair trade, research finds men and women of minority group status to be involved principally in under-paid and over-exploited areas of tourism rather than in independent, decision-making, and entrepreneurial activities (Babb, 2012; Bolles, 1997; Henrici, 2007b; Wilson & Ypeij, 2012). Meanwhile, although exceptions exist, both fair trade and tourism need improvement with regard to socioeconomic and other inequalities as well as with sustainability.

#### 3.1 Tourism and socioeconomic development

Multiple ethnographic research projects, conducted in Peru across two decades, explore trade and tourism interactions. Early investigations in Peru found that both governmental and NGO-ATO entities began in the 1960s to

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6 Quote from the president of an Afro-Peruvian artisanal NGO in El Carmen, Peru, describing one of the group's programs for fostering handicrafts and musical performances marketed to tourists, 15 June 2013.

invest into tourism. The objective of this investment was to use tourism activities, including the making and selling of crafts, to stimulate income for Peruvians. Other than within the operations of select NGO-ATOs, however, these investments seldom addressed structural inequalities and more sustainable development, which would include mitigating conventional development's harm to the environment. Moreover, socioeconomic development involving tourism in Peru has tended to incorporate specific training for men and other training for women. Development tourism in Peru, even that incorporating fair trade, has tended to maintain certain hierarchies as it has created new ones.

Peruvian hierarchies among gender, racial groupings, and ethnicity are contextual, intersectional, socioeconomic, and political. The categories that Peruvians use to describe themselves and sometimes discriminate against each other vary in meaning, particularly among different economic activities and different regions of the nation (S. Greene, 2007). At the same time, different ecological regions of Peru have been associated since at least the pre-colonial Inca Empire with different cultural groups and, since colonization, with racialized groups as well. This latter shift began as Spanish colonizers brought, along with African-descent soldiers, artisans, and slaves, European ideas concerning race as a method of classifying humans. For the nearly five hundred years since, the descendants of the colonizers have combined assumptions in Peru regarding physical difference with those regarding ethnic or cultural difference and, in turn, used such assumptions to justify occupational, educational, and legal restrictions or rights. Peruvians in the 2000s made legislative changes toward a version of multiculturalism; nevertheless, many Peruvians continue to distinguish in social, economic, and other terms those considered relatively more marked in their skin, hair, and facial features and languages, beliefs, and customs. While Asian and Middle Eastern ancestry Peruvians might receive prejudicial treatment, Peruvians who are considered more likely to face discrimination generally are lumped into one of three categories of racial and ethnic identity that are intersectional with socioeconomic class and geographic region. The first group consists of the peoples of the Peruvian Amazon River Valley with their multiple languages who are

regarded as indigenous yet, when compared with those of purportedly Inca-ancestry who speak Quechua or Aymara or who claim kinship with those who do, are portrayed by other Peruvians as relatively more “tribal” and less “noble.” The second and largest group consists of the Peruvians who speak Quechua or Aymara, who formerly lived primarily in the Andean Mountain valleys and peaks, and who have been the majority among Peruvian agricultural, mining, and urban laborers for centuries; this group is tied to Peruvian concepts of indigeneity and peasantry. The third group of Peruvians are those of African descent who principally live along the Pacific coast and who suffer from what some consider an invisible heritage, one that juxtaposes being among both the conquered and the conqueror, non-Indian and non-white, and middle class and laborer: contrasting identities that seem to cancel one another out in the multiculturalism debates that center on a concept of culture as if it could be considered apart from intersecting racial or socioeconomic class identities (S. Greene, 2007, 2012). Fair trade and tourism in Peru affect and are affected by both hierarchies and intersectionalities.

The Peruvian town of Pisac is an established part of the tourist circuit in the southern Andean Mountains that includes the major attraction of Machu Picchu. Tourists have arranged trips for over a century to the valley village and its central market. Into that marketplace, members of surrounding mountain communities wearing traditional clothing descend on Sundays, to sell their farm products, attend church, and meet with others who have similarly descended as well as representatives of the district government. These Quechua-speaking mountain-dwellers, along with nearby archaeological ruins, draw tourists to the village and vendors to meet those tourists.

By the mid-twentieth century, nonlocal artisan-vendors were coming to Pisac on Sundays to sell goods and take profits. To compete, roughly a dozen village men studied at a ceramic school that the Peruvian national government sponsored for them in the early 1960s. Years later, these trained men and their wives used their positions within artisans’ associations to obtain government travel grants and further opportunities. The men and their families were able to build houses, own cars, and occasionally attend university

from ceramics sales. Some men attributed their financial gains to the government program. Others expressed independence from any affiliation or support beyond their local religious festival dance troupe, national political party, favorite soccer team, and church.



Fig. 4 – Male workers, paid by the piece, hand painting mold-made ceramic whistles for tourist sales and export in Pisac, Peru, 1989 (Photo Jane Henrici).

Disagreements occasionally arose in the town, not only about the histories of craftwork in the area, but also about materials and motifs to be used and about who could make and sell. Although aimed at improving disparities, crafts and tourism in Pisac were not always fair trade in principle or practice.

In particular, the Peruvian government program had helped villagers, primarily of mixed European and indigenous ethnicity, to compete with outsiders of mixed or European heritage from larger urban centers. In turn, the village artisan-vendors made use of their kinship and trade relations throughout the Andes Mountains to hire networks of piece workers—often from the poorest of indigenous farming communities—and initially forbade them from selling to tourists or importers and from working with ATOs.



Fig. 5 – Man carrying piecework handicrafts, from a farming community in the higher mountain altitudes, down into the valley village of Pisac, Peru with its tourist market, 1996 (Photo Jane Henrici)

One group of Quechua-speaking males, trained and subcontracted in ceramic piecework at villager-set rates, decided in 1989 to seek more opportunities. These *comuneros* agreed, despite villager injunctions, to try to make profits through selling ceramics directly to tourists or through export. To get assistance with their proposed cooperative enterprise, the artisans asked a visiting anthropologist for help contacting ATOS. The *comuneros* sent their request down from the mountainside written on a tiny piece of paper and carried by motorbike: the messenger braked in the Pisac street just long enough to pass the note to the surprised anthropologist before driving on. Despite the group's clandestine effort, their employers soon had word of the contact, yet could not stop the subsequent flow of information and sales to the mountainside residents. After the note's delivery, however, village artisan-producers lectured the anthropologist about the dependency that certain populations (unnamed) had on NGOs and ATOS, and the corrupt politicization of such dependency and aid (Henrici, 1999).



Fig. 6 – Women from a farming community in the higher mountain altitudes, selling their hand-woven piece work to a middle merchant with a registered stall within the tourist market of the southern highland valley village of Pisac, Peru, 1989 (Photo Jane Henrici)

Gender disparities compounded disparities affecting ethnic group identity. By the late 1980s, those individuals who were considered by locals to be capable of making the hand-painted ceramics that had come to be associated with the region were almost all men, although prior to tourism development women also customarily made handicrafts. At the same time, and as had been part of ancient custom in the region, women were the primary vendors. If needed, men could sell and women could make the simpler crafts that in this part of Peru became feminized, such as jewelry and knitwear. A new gender gap thus formed in the area, even as tourism development brought rapidly multiplying new socioeconomic opportunities for mixed-ancestry families that had started out poorer relative to others in the valley village. Initially, tourism development as implemented in Pisac granted limited local control and environmental sustainability while it created new hierarchies in the powers to sell and to make (Henrici, 2002).

As the above account suggests, although tourism development can improve conditions for one formerly marginalized portion of the population, it might do so by taking advantage of others. Both sets of artisan-producers sought to

supplement farm or other income and keep household members from having to work as laborers or servants. Eventually, in part through governmental and ATO assistance, the two sets gained independent income from tourism and crafts (Henrici, 1999, 2007b).

### 3.2 Tourism alternating with trade

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Peruvian craft producers began using kinship and other links across even greater distances in order to transport handicrafts and keep up sales. The combination of droughts, hyperinflation, and violence in Peru affected local crops and herds as well as international tourism. Exporting crafts became even more critical for households and communities (Henrici, 2002, 2003). Alternating between export and tourism sales was an informal adaptation, taken on by groups throughout Peru, and fair trade as it involved ATOs was part of that.

Peruvian NGOs and ATOs, often directed and staffed by middle and upper class women and men of European and sometimes African and Asian ancestry—and sometimes by indigenous men—evolved during the late 1980s and early and mid-1990s based primarily in the capital of Lima. These groups operated as middle partners to add to community and household income through handicraft sales, whether for reinvestment in traditional agriculture, fishing, or herding, or to perpetuate ancient or folkloric art forms. The push to make craftwork either supplemental or sustaining required that even greater quantities be sold, which NGO/ATOs assisted through shops in Lima, international export, artisan-entrepreneur capacity building, and microcredit loans (Henrici, 2003, 2007a).

Peruvian women meanwhile gained in their level of authority and control over assets at every level of production and trade. Over time, both indigenous male and female Peruvian participants also gained more socioeconomic options with respect to fair trade and tourism.

Elayne Zorn notes with respect to tourism and crafts elsewhere in Peru that, after initial investments, gaining local decision-making and at least partial control over resources is critical to sustaining producer-vendors beyond just

temporarily increased incomes and moving groups toward addressing broader socioeconomic imbalances (Zorn, 2004). Gradually, and particularly through social justice struggles on the part of select Peruvian ATOs (Henrici, 2002, 2003), local decision-making, profit-sharing, self-evaluation, and fair trade labeling extended among diverse communities. Moreover, this effort expanded opportunities for both men and women across Peru (Henrici, 2007a; Mariñas Tapia, 2013).

### 3.3 Tourism and fair trade

The stated objectives of fair trade tourism are: to use combined aspects of tourism and trade to reduce poverty; meet standards of responsibility and sustainability through complying with certain expectations regarding the environment; and raise equity and empowerment among all human participants. The nation of South Africa has tested this approach, along with its FTTSA standard and certification model, and now includes in this mix craft sales along specified “craft routes” (Kalisch, 2011; Krause, 2005; Strambach & Surmeier, 2013).



Fig. 7 – Men from a mountain farming community after performing music at their fair trade tourism cooperative, above the valley village of Pisac, Peru, 2006 (Photo Jane Henrici)

By 2006 in Peru, fair trade tourism had become part of the mix that ATOs and member cooperatives turned to among alternating sources of income. Tourism in general once again had risen in the region to support development activities among smaller scale producers and vendors. This took place as travel patterns and trade agreements continued to change, and as periods passed in which crafts did not sell as well as previously through export, and as agricultural and herding activities became even more industrialized than in the past. Both community-based and resort tourism meanwhile had moved out of niche areas and into the communities, towns, and suburbs along Peru's expanding highway system.



Fig. 8 – (Left) Women community and cooperative members meeting to discuss handicrafts and home-stay tourism in Juliaca, Peru with a representative of the ATO MINKA Fair Trade SRL, 2007 (Photo Jane Henrici)

Fig. 9 – (Right) Son of a woman cooperative member playing outside while his mother attends a meeting in Juliaca, Peru to discuss handicrafts and home-stay tourism, 2007 (Photo Jane Henrici)

As within South Africa, fair trade tourism within Peru came about through a combination of local labor and public and private investments among community-based homestays, similar to those launched decades earlier on the island of Taquile (Zorn, 2004). Ethnographic research in 2006 in Peru included observations and interviews with women and men in rural and

semi-rural sites participating—at all levels of decision-making, production, and sales—in fair trade tourism. Crafts combined with tourism through more established wares such as Peruvian ceramics and sweaters, as well as more recently evolved fair trade culinary crafts and plant products such as soaps, creams, and medicines.

In 2006, the Peruvian fair trade tourism network operated through somewhat unreliable transit systems, relatively more dependable kinship connections, and international commerce regulations. By 2013, the infrastructure combining fair trade and tourism across Peru had expanded much further, and ATOS and cooperatives used their internet sites to sell craftwork, book reservations and tours, and solicit support.

Fair trade merged with tourism in Peru in a formal manner with respect to the standards to be followed, then added the labeling to be used. Both Peruvian crafts and tourist activities now make use of WFTO guarantees. The designated goods and packages sold by Peruvian producer cooperatives and ATOS employ fair trade marketing and fair trade labels.

Following decades of experience in the highlands of Peru, fair trade tourism seems to be achieving better outcomes than earlier forms of either tourism or fair trade. While more extensive examination of this relatively evolved system would be useful, another question that arises is whether newer fair trade tourism projects have also proven to be effective among other, also marginalized, Peruvians.

### 3.4 Toward a fair chance in tourism

In 2013, as part of an ethnographic project along the southern coast of Peru in the areas damaged by the 2007 earthquake, women and men in smaller communities and poorer neighborhoods recounted the lack of governmental support they received during the recovery period to rebuild either their homes or their subsistence sources. Women in particular reported that they were not given shelter, much less assistance toward reconstruction, if they lacked property titles to show where their houses had stood: women might

lack property titles if they had never paid for formal ownership, or if the titles were placed only in the name of household males. In one case, a woman reported during an interview arranged by human rights NGO workers assisting with the recovery that her sister had the documents to prove she was the landowner, yet had been denied her claim regardless.

Moreover, women interviewed described continued higher incidents of gender-based violence relative to their lives prior to the disaster. Women also detailed a new and general lack of access to affordable food, unlike conditions before the earthquake, brought about by the large-scale reconstruction development in the area that supplanted smaller scale orchards and farms and destroyed smaller scale artisanal fishing along the Pacific coast.

Issues of race and ethnicity in the region meanwhile have compounded those of gender. In the Peruvian media following the 2007 earthquake, race was occasionally noted to mark the suffering and skills of those affected, since certain of the affected communities were predominantly Afro-Peruvian. That low-income, wage-dependent, and female-headed households apparently also predominated among the little towns and worker communities remained unstated as a feature either of the region or of the recovery. At the same time, much of what seemed an international largesse failed to make its way to the actual reconstruction of the homes and infrastructural systems that were destroyed, much less to support any serious investment in tourism development among those most harmed (Polastro, 2008). In June 2013, a Peruvian congressional report was released concerning recovery fund fraud. Although the governmental investigation did not mention gender, race, or ethnicity as features of the disaster or of the misappropriated funds, the relatively greater vulnerability of those most affected by the damages, if not outright discrimination, no doubt contributed to the ease with which the manipulations took place.

Human rights agencies meanwhile have remained active and focused on improving access to new homes, better sanitation, and household food security in the southern coastal region of Peru. Locally-based Peruvian race and women's rights groups have worked to help Afro-Peruvian girls and women

as well as those of other ethnicities and boys and men to counter discrimination and, where not defeating popular and mass media stereotypes, perhaps to make selective use of them.

For example, Rosa María's Afro-Peruvian organization, Las Morenas, was supported with funding from the Italian COOPI so that post-disaster local women could make money through culinary fair trade tourism. As described earlier, the activity involves producing and selling traditional artisanal sweets packaged in containers with printed labels. In addition to the information listed earlier, those labels display a stereotypic cartoon image of an Afro-Peruvian woman's face that is very much like those denounced in publications and a successful lawsuit by the Afro-Peruvian rights group LUNDU.<sup>7</sup> This portrayal in fair trade tourism sales is deliberate, although whether its users consider it subversive remains unclear. Indeed, Peruvian NGO/ATOs tend to employ imagery in their training and outreach materials that depict individuals with straight hair and narrow eyes to represent those of indigenous or European and indigenous mixed ancestry; Afro-Peruvian imagery even within social justice work often remains either absent or, as in this case, very particular (cf. S. Greene, 2012).

Arguably, if recovery practice using fair trade tourism builds on stereotypes, then *it is using* vulnerability to stimulate calls for governmental protections and donor supports. Conversely, the concept of capability, or what might make a person or place resilient, becomes a feature to celebrate as though needing neither ongoing investment nor aid to be sustainable. Within this conventional paradigm, it can be hard to separate admiration and demonstration of pride in culture and resiliency from a circumscription of opportunity. As Rosa María sold her fair trade culinary crafts in 2013, Las Morenas as a cooperative faced its final year of COOPI assistance.

Conventional approaches to tourism development and disaster recovery could have been inverted in Peru. If that had happened, then governmental

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7      <http://lundu.org.pe/> [last access 30.06.2015]

and NGO/ATO support could have gone instead to improve smaller scale farming and fishing in the area for the women and men who, in fact, were primarily farmers, farm laborers, and artisanal fisher-folk prior to the quake. This could have occurred while being attentive to issues of the environment, and to those of disaster displacement and economic migration. Participation in fair trade confectionary production for tourism meanwhile could have been supplemental rather than the exclusive investment. Indeed, prior to the earthquake, traditional crafts in tourism sales were limited in the area to either very peripheral work, or conversely to that by those who were Afro-Peruvian restaurant employees and music specialists (Léon, 2009).

Instead, the bulk of international development and recovery money that made it to the smaller communities along the southern coast went toward what interviewed women state is the massive destruction of local fishing and the delicate desert coastline for a new natural gas plant and intensified export-driven agricultural businesses. In addition, at this point, fair trade tourism has little chance of being sustainable much less improve socioeconomic relations, given that the same recovery funds that failed to arrive for low-income family housing also appear to have arrived for local tourism development.

#### 4. Conclusion

Women and men, notably those experiencing racial and ethnic group discrimination, reportedly are finding new opportunities in fair trade tourism where it has become most established, in South Africa (K. Greene, 2012). As this chapter has described, various communities and organizations working in parts of Peru also have built up, across several decades, working projects of fair trade tourism.

Meanwhile, women around the world—particularly where organized and able to push against fair trade's gaps and weaknesses—appear to be building resilient livelihoods on craft manufacture and sales through export (Hutch-

ens, 2010; Jones, Smith & Wills, 2012) that may be supplemented by tourism, particularly through homestays (K. Greene, 2012; Henrici, 2003). Yet, in other marginalized communities, women continue to face disparity and discrimination even where fair trade tourism has been initiated.

The merger of fair trade with tourism, while making fair trade tourism more standardized and formal, has been argued as potentially yielding more equitable, sustainable, and participatory socioeconomic development than investment in either fair trade or tourism alone (Kalisch, 2011). Proponents argue that fair trade tourism could address both environmental sustainability and social justice concerns. To be effective, research in Peru suggests that fair trade tourism should be accompanied by local control over standards, labels, and profits. Such local control, however, must balance with protections and investments by nonlocal public and private entities.

At the same time, all forms of control in fair trade tourism activities—over the power to name, sell, and make—should be transparent and accountable. Moreover, the fact that socioeconomic disparities can exist at every level, and throughout populations, calls for more explicit recognition in fair trade and tourism development.

Other concerns that continue to need examination regarding fair trade tourism are with fair trade's weaknesses in general (Jaffee, 2007), its relatively narrow role in tourism despite decades of interaction in particular (Krause, 2005; Strambach & Surmeier, 2013), and its problems specifically associated with crafts of different types (Hutchens, 2010; Wilson, 2010). As anthropology and other disciplines continue to critically examine and challenge conditions of disparity, particularly those interacting with gender and its intersectional ethnic and racial group identities, fair trade tourism seems important both to investigate as well as to improve.

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# Expert Translations of Torture and Trauma: A Multisited Ethnography

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## Abstract

This chapter describes and analyses the processes through which some practices of the “global fight against torture” have acquired new meanings and functions in contemporary Europe. Medical and psychological knowledge practices regarding torture are not only intertwined with legal processes of recognition aimed at holding perpetrators accountable, but also with asylum procedures. In many European countries medico-legal and psychological documentation of torture is increasingly used to substantiate asylum applications of victim-survivors seeking international protection. Using my interviews with medical-legal experts, psychologists and lawyers as a point of departure, I will discuss this documentation as a social practice of knowledge production embedded within landscapes of meaning and power. This contribution seeks to reflect upon the epistemologies, the techniques and the ethics through which testimonies of torture are received, read, listened and responded to. How do experts translate an intimate experience to make it recognizable by public institutions? How are legal uncertainty, denial or mistrust dealt with? Contemporary understandings of “trauma” have shaped the recognition of victim-survivors. Data from a multisited ethnographic research project carried out with NGOs who provide support to victim-survivors of torture will be situated within the historical emergence of this documentation practice and its current entanglement with European asylum policy and migration management.

## 1. Introduction

The manufacture of a narrative that is not complicit with the perpetuation of trauma again included, as one of its moments, a war inside language, around the act of naming. [...].

For the political and therapeutic task of representation of trauma, the dictionary is the battlefield. (Avelar, 2001, p. 262)

At a public conference entitled “Torture and its consequences”<sup>1</sup> two doctors presented their life-long work on behalf of persons who suffered torture. Justice, awareness raising, prevention and rehabilitation were named by the two doctors as key tasks in the so called “global fight against torture”. With reference to the UN definition of torture, which defines torture as “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession [...]” (UNCAT, 1984, art. 1), one of the two speakers pointed out: “The question is, what is ‘severe’? We think that there are only two persons who can decide what is ‘severe’: the victims or the doctor. Not the lawyer.”

From this description it emerges that medical and psychological knowledge practices regarding torture have become intertwined with legal processes of recognition aimed at holding perpetrators accountable (“justice”) and in enabling access to healthcare (“rehabilitation”). And that there are contested opinions over who holds the “truth” over a given pain. Indeed, in the European context medico-legal documentation of torture has recently found growing application within asylum proceedings in the form of expert reports aimed at substantiating asylum applications of persons who suffered torture in their countries of origin and who seek international protection in the EU; or in the individuation of so called “traumatized refugees” in need of care.

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<sup>1</sup> Public Talk “La tortura y sus consecuencias”, 28th of May 2009, Barcelona [tape recorded with permission]. Speakers were one founding member of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims and one former Rapporteur of the United Nations Committee against Torture and former vice-president of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture.

Legal recognition of who is considered a refugee, or who a victim-survivor of torture/ill-treatment, relies mostly upon knowledge practices regarding the circumstances and purposes of persecution and torture. Notwithstanding, in the absence of “hard evidence” it is the “fear” and the “pain” of the individual that are increasingly constructed as “epistemological objects”: as objects of knowledge production, the body and the mind are perceived as bearing traces of truth. Fear is one criterion in the definition of what constitutes a refugee—a person with “well-founded fear” of persecution (UN General Assembly, 1951). And pain is one criterion of what constitutes torture—“severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, [...] intentionally inflicted” (UN General Assembly, 1984). However, in international criminal courts and in asylum hearings the oral testimony of victim-survivors is considered “the least credible and most impeachable form of evidence” (Byrne, 2007, p. 614). In asylum proceedings expert reports documenting evidence of ill-treatment/torture are not applied to investigate and prosecute “torture” but instead to corroborate the credibility of a persons’ testimony.

In this chapter I want to show how ethnographic research and anthropological theory can help to understand how intimate experiences such as torture and fear of persecution are translated through medico-legal expertise within asylum procedures, as they try to render such experiences recognizable by public institutions. My aim is to describe and to analyse how the “global fight against torture” through documentation practices plays out in asylum procedures. Special attention will be given to the practices and professional identities of the experts who are engaged in providing medico-legal and psychological evidence. I consider the making of these documents as social and cultural practice that takes place within specific historical contexts, which shape their epistemological categories and their meanings. The practices of medico-legal and psychological documentation of torture and related practices of knowledge production are embedded in institutional landscapes of meaning and power, which can be understood as a set-up of discourse and practice, as “boundless of technologies, narrative styles, modes of discourse, and, importantly, erasures and silences” (Saris, 1995, p. 42). How can we understand the “war inside language”, the “battlefield” of the

dictionary when it comes to name “trauma” (as in the quote by Idelbar Avelar) or when doctors are called to “decide” over the “severity” of pain (as in the conference quote above)?

My argument is that this expert practice has undergone a change of meaning and power through its application in asylum proceedings and that a closer look into the professional worlds of experts gives insight into the complexities of this practice within contemporary Europe.

My focus has not been to understand the trajectories of victim-survivors or of asylum seekers, but to study “up” and “through” the institutional and epistemological landscapes that condition and shape the way in which testimonies of violence are received and responded to. This writing is based on research carried out between 2007 and 2009<sup>2</sup>. I will draw on ethnographic data from two European countries and situate the findings within ongoing moves to “harmonize” the European asylum system and related policies and practices. In particular, but not exclusively, I have worked with two non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are providing psychosocial and medico(-legal) support to victim-survivors of torture and of human rights

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2 I am thankful to two anonymous reviewers of this contribution, as well as to the editors of this publication, Dorothy Zinn and Elisabeth Tauber, for their reviews and comments on this paper. This chapter is based on ethnographic research (conducted between 2007–2009 as part of a European Joint Master’s Program in Anthropology) regarding the production and utilization of medico-legal/psychological documentation of torture and violence within the context of asylum applications in Europe, with particular focus on Ireland and Spain. I thus thank my thesis supervisors Dr. Mark Maguire (NUIM) and Dr. Dan Rodriguez-García (UAB) for their supervision and National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM) for a scholarship. The results of the research can be found in *Torture Evidence on Trial: (missing) scars, “innocent” scars, invisible wounds. Anthropological Reflections on the Documentation of Fear and Violence in European Asylum Procedures*, October 2009, NUIM (unpublished MA thesis). I am also indebted to Dr. Ivo Quaranta from the University of Bologna, who during my first years as anthropology student got me interested in critical medical anthropology and to Gregory Feldman for an e-mail exchange concerning non-local ethnography. I also thank Katherine Whitson, a lawyer and friend from the US, for her English proofreading. A big thank you for many informal chats also goes to various friends who came as refugees to Europe: they were not part of this study, but I dedicate this work to them. Last but not least, I wish to express my deep thanks and gratitude to the professionals who shared their precious time, their experiences, their opinions and feelings with me for the purpose of this study: medical doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, lawyers. I thank the participating NGOs and professionals, which for reasons of anonymity and confidentiality I have not mentioned in this paper, for enabling me to conduct research in their centres on such a sensitive topic.

abuses. For the argument developed in this chapter, I want to start out with interview excerpts that can serve as an example of how some medical experts and psychologists experience the assessment and report writing for the purpose of producing this documentation.

Most cases I see are genuine. [...] Lately indeed I had one ... you can't contradict his story. But what do you do? How do you interpret that in your report? I mean, you don't want to give a report that is going to completely condemn the person. (Interview with a doctor who only recently started doing medico-legal reports and discussed with me her<sup>3</sup> major challenges).

[Reports] are complex, because you are writing down things that will determinate if a person will get salvation or not! I see it like a salvation. Because if these persons [the adjudicators], for a report will reject or accept someone, this is a responsibility that is too much for one, as psychologist, as a professional. To me this is very complicated. (Interview with a psychologist, who only eventually would write a psychological certificate).

Independent of the actual evidentiary weight given to a report, the responsibility felt by the health-care personnel is significant. "Salvation" or "condemnation" here do not regard the soteriological role of medical practice to transform suffering and achieve salvation. And the moral meaning of their practice might differ from countering impunity and documenting torture for the purpose of holding perpetrators accountable. Here "salvation" and "condemnation" are linked to the responsibility of establishing "the" causal relationship between past violences and their traces on the minds and bodies of asylum applicants, in a context where asylum seekers that fail to appear credible or fail to present enough evidence to support their fear of persecution might receive a negative response to their application. As rejected applicants for international protection, they become illegal and deportable immigrants. As we shall see, these are quite different (institutional) landscapes of meaning and power than those in which this docu-

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3 Throughout the text I have used female pronouns when referring to my interview participants.

mentation practice and the related standardized reporting techniques were developed. A doctor, who at the time of the interview had recently started writing medico-legal reports, described the assessment and write-up with the following words:

We have to be very objective. They could tell you the most horrible story, but sometimes there can be discrepancies. It's kind of hard. And then you have all this information and the wording they want is specific here, 'he claims, he alleges' And then, the person is telling you a story... It gets hard.

In the text making process of writing medico-legal reports, experts are required to use the wording such as "he claims". This wording postulates a distance between what is known to the doctor and what is said by a patient/client and indicates the relationship the expert holds to the testimony (Fassin & d'Halluin, 2005). But some professionals felt that this wording intruded the doctor-patient (or doctor-client) relationship—this was particularly the case for those professionals who in their everyday occupation worked as general health care practitioners (GP) and those who joined an expert-team only recently. As one explained to me, during the anamnesis and examination she would be constantly thinking of how to put that into words later: "How can I say this, how can I type it up?" But as a doctor, she added, it is not important if what the persons says is "true". The main characteristic of a doctor was often described to me as "being able to respond to suffering". One of the reasons for working in this context, according to one doctor, was "sympathy for the injured". Now the task is not the ability to respond to suffering but, as one of the doctors said, the task is to "give an opinion, that this person is suffering as a result: his symptoms are consistent with what he says." The job of the health practitioner becomes a responsibility (response-ability) in terms of making a diagnosis of suffering that establishes the degree of consistency with an alleged event that is deemed to be its origin or cause [etiological event], and of translating her expert opinion into correct text. But sometimes injuries tell multiple stories; sometimes visible injuries are missing.

[The establishment of consistency] is a kind of a responsibility as well. Because there might be some that appear to be quite okay and they have recovered—extraordinarily well, apparently—from whatever they have gone through in prison and that. So one has to say: well, they seem to have recovered now, even though they have given such a history. You know, you can't blame them for being healthy [doctor laughs, shakes head].

Through these processes, the (in)communicability of torture finds its paths into objectification, becomes (in)translatable. What sort of “responsibility”—to quote the doctor—and “ability to respond” demands a testimony of violence from those who witness it? What does it mean and imply, when medical and psychological knowledge gets entangled in discerning between who is considered a legitimate “refugee” and who indeed falls out of the categories for international protection?

In order to understand these interview excerpts and the experiences of these professionals, it is necessary to trace two story lines that are intertwined in their practices. Therefore, I will first trace the historical development of medico-legal documentation in order to see how the “global fight against torture” through documentation has developed and plays out in different local levels and historical contexts. Within this “history of the present” I will also discuss how the concept of “physical and mental trauma” has shaped the recognition of victim-survivors. With regard to documentation used to substantiate asylum applications, it will then be necessary to briefly discuss the European context of asylum and migration management. The European policy instruments that seek to harmonize asylum practices gave categorical visibility to victim-survivors of torture as “vulnerable persons with special needs” due to trauma (Weissensteiner, 2010). I speak in a generalized way about “Europe” due to the attempt to establish a common European space of international protection and due to the fact that there is evidence that these particular documentation practices have acquired importance in various member states. On the other hand, of course, it is necessary to see how this practice plays out in different national contexts and local levels. In a key article on this subject, published by Didier Fassin and Estelle d’Halluin

(2005), the authors point out that in contemporary France two historical processes converged: on the side of the “refugee category” there is the decline in the legitimacy of asylum and the increased request for evidence to establish the reality of persecution, on the other side there is the emergence of “trauma” within the classification of diseases [as a nosological category], legitimizing the traces of violence. The two authors make eloquently their point: “trauma” says less about the truth of an individualized asylum seeking population, than about the truth of political asylum in Europe. Both categories—“refugee” and “trauma”—are not a-historical, but like other categories they are socially and culturally situated and reconfigured through ongoing processes (cf. Malkki, 1992, 1995; Young, 1995). For researches interested in governmentality (cf. Foucault, 2007; Rose & Miller, 1992; Rabinow & Rose, 2003; Inda, 2006; Shore, Wright & Però, 2011) the relationship between knowledge production and power and the entanglement between expertise and governmental practice has in recent years become an important field of research. Governmental practice relies upon particular forms of knowledge—*assemblage* of persons, theories, projects, experiments and expertise—from psychology, criminology to social science, that have the subjects to be governed as objects of study. They produce particular ways of thinking and perceiving reality, discerning between what is normal/abnormal, what is true/false, and contemporaneously they provide a know-how to elaborate solutions for management. Anthropological research regarding in some way what I call here the entanglement between medical or psychological knowledge production and the asylum procedure has been undertaken in different national context, like in France (Fassin & d’Halluin, 2005, 2007), the Netherlands (Richter 2004), Canada (Kirmayer, Lemelson & Barad, 2007), Switzerland (Salis Gross, 2004), the UK (Kelly, 2012). Among other issues, the authors highlight the political and ethical conflicts arising from medical, psychological or medico-legal documentation. Different expectations towards the style of medico-legal report writing and their interpretation has also been discussed in the literature (Good, 2004; Rousseau, Crépeau, Foxen & Houle, 2002, Jones & Smith, 2004). This area of research can be situated within a broader study of expert knowledge production (categorical constructions, social conditions of knowledge produc-

tion, expertise), law and indeterminacy and on how uncertainty is dealt with in asylum proceedings (Moore, 2000 [1978], 1994; Yngvesson & Coutin, 2006; Cabot, 2013; Fassin & Rechtman, 2007). From my own ethnographic research that focused in particular on Ireland and Spain (Weissensteiner, 2009), it emerged that the different national contexts in their political, policy, legal and historical dimension influence practices, meanings and implications of this documentation. But also differences in ethos and clinical approach of the involved NGOs and of single professionals shape practice and meaning of this documentation. Notwithstanding notable differences within national realities in the European context, these practices however also have to be viewed and analysed for their “European” dimension and within ongoing moves towards harmonization of asylum policy on EU level.

## 2. A note on methodology and methods

During my research and prior to conducting interviews with medical experts and psychologists, I spent various months as volunteer and intern mainly at two different NGOs that offer psycho-social and medical support, as well as medico-legal/psychological certification. Participating in everyday activities enabled me to gain insight and understanding of the daily routine and the “issues that mattered” (Riles, 2000) in these centres. One NGO focused primarily on therapy, but occasionally psychological reports were written, the other had started to pay special attention to the application of the Istanbul Protocol and was providing further training and supervision to its (new) medico-legal experts. So, for example, I would interview a medical doctor after having transcribed one of his medico-legal reports. Importantly, the content of this report was not part of my research data. Nor could I use as research data any information I knew about from my work activities in the centre. I was also involved in two annual meetings of the European Network of Rehabilitation Centres for Survivors of Torture. Also, I interviewed lawyers who followed the cases of applicants that had reported being subjected to torture.

Moving research from concrete places and interactions into the realm of European Union [EU] policy and migration management opens up also a methodological question: how can ethnographic research in a “[global world] account for empirical processes that cannot be fully apprehended through participant observation” (Feldman, 2011, p. 33)? My research methods thus draw on recent methodological developments inside anthropology and on the work of anthropologists who have pointed out the necessity to study institutions, documents, policy or to engage in the variety of elements that are intertwined in an apparatus like the EU. As I already mentioned, important theoretical input can be found in works by philosophers, political scientists and anthropologists interested in governmentality and in the knowledge/power nexus. Concerning related methodological aspects, there have been calls of caution not to reduce the object of study to the object of observation (Trouillot, 2001, p. 135). Scholars have proposed to collect data eclectically from a disparate array of sources (Gusterson, 1997, p. 116), such as archives, jurisdiction, documents, policy, laws, newspapers, reports, online-sources (cf. Riles, 2000, 2006; Shore et al., 2011). Without entering into the different nuances of the following methodological concepts (cf. Feldman, for a discussion, 2012), approaches that combine traditional ethnographic methods with a variety of research methods have been defined as “studying-up” (Nader, 1972), as “multisited ethnography” (Marcus, 1995), as “studying through” (Shore et al., 2011), as “nonlocal ethnography” (Feldman, 2011). These approaches highlight the importance to study “bodies that govern human relations rather than to study the governed themselves” (Nader, 1972), without “presuming a vertical hierarchical relation between policy makers determining policy and implementing it on the governed” (Shore et al., 2011, p. 101), but analysing dynamics, conflicts, negotiations between different protagonists over time. This implies necessarily conducting a “multisited ethnography” and rendering ethnography a genealogical approach towards the processes through which certain practices and discourses have come into being. Marcus (1995) highlights the importance of following a particular object, story, metaphor etc. and researching on multiple sites in order to reveal the working of a system. Shore, Wright and Però added “policy” to this list (2011). Feldman (2011) argues that these are also sites

“beyond the locality” when it comes to studying a (migration management) apparatus such as the EU and its discourses that enable, organize and integrate many disparate policy practices, which requires to integrate different methods into an ethnographic methodology.

In my specific case of study, this meant collecting and studying internal and external reports and conference notes drafted by non-governmental-organizations (NGOs) or international organizations (IOs), following and analysing EU policy developments over time in the field of asylum and related reports by a variety of agents, consulting specialized journals and books for medical and legal discourses and debates concerning torture, as well as reviewing a sample of national refugee-status determinations that concerned victim-survivors of torture who applied for international protection. In the main part of this chapter I will therefore integrate fieldwork data from open-ended and semi-structured interviews with data from various sources. I first trace the development of documentation practices regarding torture, before entering into a brief discussion of how victim-survivors of torture gained categorical visibility in EU asylum directives. I then analyse the landscapes of meaning and power in which trauma and expertise on it have emerged as a means for translating violence in order to make it recognizable by public institutions. These institutional landscapes, as pointed out by Saris (1995), can be understood as a set-up of discourse and practice, narratives, but also silences.

### **3. Torture pain’s (in)expressibility and the Istanbul Protocol as a technology of knowledge production**

The prohibition of torture is considered to be one of the most fundamental standards of the international community. There has been a notable change in the meanings ascribed to torture over the last hundred years, from being a legitimate judicial procedure to elicit truth, to being considered the worst infraction of the physical, psychological and moral integrity of a human being (Kelly, 2012). However, it was only through a couple of historical moments in the last sixty years—the war in Algeria in the 1950s and 1960s,

the Vietnam war, the military coup in Greece in 1976, a couple of military coups in Latin America—linked with an increased representation in the media, that torture gained public visibility and that with the fall of regimes prosecution became possible (Welsh, 2002; Rejali, 2007; Stover, 2005). In this context the legally binding prohibition of torture, documentation and monitoring have developed, as well as testimonial therapy and first treatment centres. Amnesty International (AI) launched the first international campaign against torture in the early 1970s (AI 1973), as a result of which the first AI Medical Group was established in Denmark.

"At this time, very little was known about torture methods or the physical or psychosocial consequences for torture victims"<sup>4</sup>. According to a founding member of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) this first study of torture was needed in order to counter impunity, because there was the need "to say that it is real. AI said that we should be able to prove torture. [In court] they were always saying—if there were broken arms or no teeth or eyes taken out [...]—that it was the torture victims who did it themselves, it was self-damage"<sup>5</sup>. From the initial aim to document torture for potential legal proceedings, through this first assessment it became evident to the doctors that it was "critical to identify methods to treat and to rehabilitate" victims of torture (*ibid*). Traces of violence thus need expert translation in order to become "true" signs of violence. And pain as object of knowledge is accessed through a particular way of reading the body and words of survivors in order to make "real", what otherwise is said to be illegible, unrepresentable or simply not true—i.e. non real.

Despite the development of legally binding norms and monitoring entities, torture is still a widespread practice. International experts in law, health and human rights have pushed forward to create the so called Istanbul Protocol (IP), the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

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4      <http://www.irct.org/about-us/what-is-the-irct/history.aspx> [last access 07.10.2014]

5      Public talk "La tortura y sus consecuencias", 28th of May 2009, Barcelona

(OHCHR – UN, 1999 [2004]). Today this is the main instrument for the investigation of torture<sup>6</sup>. It was developed in response to the practices of some governments that challenged or dismissed medical evidence of torture based on clinical assessments and at times called for more “scientific” documentation (Welsh, 2002, p. 14). Expertise is thus not only a particular technology of sight and the medical expert the presumed authority to “decide” about the “severity” of a given pain, but expertise is also an authoritative genre of representation through procedurally correct text-making (Blommaert, 2001). The IP’s first aim is the prosecution of perpetrators and the challenge of impunity, but also its use for substantiating asylum applications was envisaged (2004, p. 18). Through the promotion of different non-governmental organizations, the IP has recently found application within European asylum proceedings. In the European context, those who are likely to deny claims or have “downplayed, ignored or even disputed” medical evidence, according to the IRCT (2007), are then not the states that are accused of torturing, but the member states of the European Union. Here legal, medical and psychological fields of knowledge become intertwined with the governmental task to respect international obligations, “European values” and domestic regulations, whilst regulating and managing contemporary migration movements and so-called “mixed flows”.

#### 4. European asylum and migration management and victim-survivors of torture as target of care and control

One medical doctor and therapist—who has been working over the last forty years in Europe with victim-survivors of violence and human rights abuses, and who himself was subjected to torture in his home country and was

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6 A medico-legal assessment through the IP consists of four elements: the “history taking”; the medical assessment through body inspection, documentation and differentiation between so-called “innocent scars” and torture-consistent evidence; a psychological mental state assessment; and report writing. The aim of the IP assessment is to indicate the degree of consistency between every finding and its alleged cause, whereby, however, the absence of scars or mental distress should not be taken as proof for the non-veracity of a claim and not lead to the conclusion that torture did not happen.

granted asylum in Europe in the 1970s—said to me in an interview: “Back then an open and sensible Europe still existed. [Today] the asylum procedure is not there to grant asylum, but to expulse people”.

Notably, in the 1970s asylum seekers and refugees were not asked to prove their claim that they had been subjected to torture in their country of origin, in order to establish their “well-founded fear of persecution”. The persons who participated in the first AI medical study of torture with the aim to counter impunity, were already granted refugee status in Denmark. The change that had occurred can also be found in the founding history of the European Network of Rehabilitation Centres for Survivors of Torture in 2003, composed by NGOs supporting victim-survivors of torture in Europe:

[E]verybody agreed that we needed a European Network because we share a common problem: European countries try to protect their borders against refugees—thus making it impossible for torture victims and victims of severe human rights violations to enter Europe. At the same time European countries are so proud of the fact that Human Rights are their invention and they tell the world how much they do to protect human rights. (Bittenbinder, 2008)

The asylum procedure “to expulse people”, as the health care professional quoted before called it, can be seen as part of the procedures which link knowledge and power and differentiate between legitimate receiver of protection and deportable immigrants. They have been standardized in the creation of a Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which has emerged as part of communitarized policy simultaneously addressing asylum, migration management and security measurements, in order to find common solutions to the identified challenge of “a major flow of persons seeking international protection in the EU since the 1990s”. The creation of the European Network of Rehabilitation Centres for Survivors of Torture has to be located within this particular historical context. In CEAS related policy papers the image of “mixed flows” emerges as central problematization: flows composed of “both illegal immigrants as well as persons in need of protection” (European Commission, 2007, point 5.3). The asylum procedure has become an instrument and regime of truth of governments to discern between different “cate-

gories" of migrants and their "entitlements" with the effect of using particular forms of verification to establish who is judged to be "truly" a legitimate receiver of protection and who becomes a deportable "failed asylum seeker". In this context documentation of past torture, as a particular technique of verification, has acquired new meanings.

Throughout the policy development and implementation of the establishment of a "harmonized" Common European Asylum System (CEAS)<sup>7</sup> there has been a strong interaction between state and "non-state" institutions like NGOs. As I have described and analysed in detail elsewhere (Weissensteiner, 2010), within CEAS-policy-development victim-survivors of torture have emerged as meaningful target for (non)governmental action in the figure of the "traumatized refugee": as historical reality as well as objects of knowledge, of care and of control. Initially victim-survivors of torture and of violence were given categorical visibility in the Reception Directive, within the classification of "vulnerable persons" with special needs. In contrast to the other groups listed in this category their visibility is least evident: "survivors of torture and ill-treatment—highly traumatized by their experiences—prove very difficult to identify" (IRCT, 2007). NGOs took an active role by pointing out that despite the initial emphasis in the Reception Directive, neither the Qualification Directive nor the Directive on Procedures took into account the special situation of victims of violence. It is in this context that "trauma" has emerged as core symbol within a critique of accelerated asylum procedures, focus on consistency, poorly conducted interviews and rejections of asylum applications due to "lack of credibility". This critique was advanced by a transnational health and human rights NGO lobby. "Practice shows that instead of viewing inaccuracies and inconsistencies as signs of possible medical complications due to acts of persecution,

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<sup>7</sup> The "Reception Directive" set up standards for reception conditions, the "Directive on Procedures" for asylum procedures and the "Qualification Directive" the criteria for granting international protection. The "Dublin Regulation" and related "Eurodac-Regulation" determine the State responsible for examining an asylum application. Despite the revision of these policy instruments and their disposal into national frameworks, member states up to now still present very heterogeneous realities.

asylum claims are often rejected for being considered ‘inconsistent’ and for that reason ‘manifestly unfounded’”<sup>8</sup>.

The interpretation of signs as “incoherence”, “inaccuracy”, “inconsistency”, as “lack of credibility” and thus proof of an illegitimate claim, through the eyes of the expert could be interpreted differently, as being indeed proof of a legitimate claim. The identification of past violence through a diagnosis of health is made in a politically charged environment. Memory –“traumatic memory”—becomes a political battlefield, to use the expression of Idelbar Avelar, with which I opened this chapter. As a lawyer told me in an interview occasion, traumatic memory is not necessarily taken as evidence of past persecution, but “any report is good that states that there is impaired memory. Even if the overall story is credible, I would always include a report that documents memory problems. It is still easy to get a date wrong.”

## 5. Torture “arms races”, “battlefields” and “trauma gaps” that matter

During an interview one day sitting in the doctors’ room at the NGO where I conducted part of this research, practice showed an even more complex picture. A medical expert exclaimed to me almost complaining: “Expert torturers don’t leave marks. Justice needs to understand that”. This doctor, who had enough years of work experience to qualify for retirement, had indeed decided to keep working for an NGO as medical doctor conducting both medical assessments to define needs of care as well as producing medical-legal documentation of torture. She strongly believed in her vocation to work on behalf of “the injured” and explained to me her personal and practical difficulties with this documentation practice. In fact, this NGO would produce medical-legal reports at the request of a lawyer on behalf of an asylum applicant or directly at the request of the national Department of

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8      <http://www.irct.org/investigation-documentation/the-istanbul-protocol/asylum-procedures.aspx>  
[last access 28.06.2015]

Justice. With “Justice” in the quote above, she referred precisely to this national Department of Justice, where the tribunal responsible for processing asylum applications and assessing testimonial and documentary evidence is located.

As the historian Rejali (2007, p. 572) points out, “[W]hen monitors exposed torture to public censure through careful documentation, torturers responded by investing less visible and harder to document techniques”. Today, many torture techniques are “clean tortures”<sup>9</sup>: they are meant not to leave any marks at all and so they break down the ability to “show pain”, thus rendering the recognition of torture almost impossible. Care is taken not to break the skin.

Scarry [1985] is right to draw attention to the importance of expression in torture [...but] the inexpressibility that matters politically is not the gap between the brain and the tongue, but between victims and their communities, a gap that is cynically calculated, a gap that shelters a state’s legitimacy. (Rejali, 2007, p. 31)

In *The Medical Documentation of Torture* (Peel & Iacopino, 2002), James Welsh writes

[t]here is a risk that the result of the contest between torturers using less physically damaging torture methods and medical specialists using increasingly sophisticated forensic techniques—a torture “arms race” [...]—will be a progressive increase in the burden of proof being placed on medical witnesses. (2002, p. 13)

It thus becomes important to inquire how the global “torture arms race”, placing the burden of proof increasingly on the medical witnesses, plays out within asylum proceedings: here, in contrast to criminal proceedings, the

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9 Rejali calls physical torture techniques that do not leave any marks “stealth torture” (for example electro-torture, the use of ice, water, spices, sleep deprivation, noise and drugs or clean beating, exhaustion exercises). Unlike “psychological torture” (although this distinction has been challenged), stealth torture is applied physically to the body.

burden of proof should notably be much lower. As a lawyer who presented applications of asylum seekers to the Justice tribunal mentioned above explained to me:

A good report is one with physical evidence, and psychological. If [the evidence in a report] is only psychological, it is not helpful. [...]. [In] a bad report there are no scars of physical evidence and the report states that the mental state is "consistent" with the account of the applicant. That is challenged by the tribunal.

As torture frequently leaves no physical marks or only nonspecific scars, psychological assessments and psychiatric diagnoses that document "severe mental harm" have gained importance. Initially there was an expectation that a particular "torture syndrome" (AI, 1973) existed. Now physicians agree that there is no medical condition that can be linked to torture. In the absence of a specific torture syndrome, the most frequent psychiatric diagnoses are Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and major depression (Wenzel, 2007). Questionnaires to objectively "score the trauma" have been developed. However, though the origin of PTSD is found in a traumatic event, there is no causal link between exposure of a "traumatic event" and the development of PTSD. Also, commonly researchers have studies the torture squeal in relation to refugee populations: facing difficult living conditions in the present impacts the possible development and chronicification of distress (Wenzel, 2007), while a positive recovery environment could also become a potential factor of resilience (Siltove, 2006).

Kirmayer et al. argue that the construct of PTSD has gained centre stage in the research, writing and clinical intervention due to a variety of factors. "Culturally, the diagnosis of PTSD has been an important move in the struggle to determine accountability for suffering and to seek restitution and redress. By connecting current symptoms and suffering to past events, the diagnosis of PTSD assigns causality and, to some degree, responsibility and blame" (Kirmayer et al., 2007, pp. 1–2). Likewise, Fassin and Rechtman argue that trauma not only causes suffering in need of care, but has also become an (ambiguous) social and moral resource for victims to have their rights recognized, a "tool in the demand for justice" (2007). "Trauma" has had a long

chronological and semiotic migration from its meaning up to the end of the nineteenth century, when it referred exclusively to physical injuries, to its present admission into the “universal” territory of psychiatric entities through its introduction as “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Beside these diachronic changes (cf. Young, 1995), today there are also different constructions of how to understand the effects of violence within the discourse of mental health professionals and there are heated debates between those who adhere to the PTSD model and those who are rather sceptical (Siltove, 2006; Summerfield, 1999). However, as outlined by Bittenbinder (2006), “trauma” can be understood not only as medical and psychiatric category, but also as a psychodynamic process and as a social and political process. The first two Western interpretations tend to localize it as “traumatic memory” within the individual, the latter highlights the socio- and political context of “trauma”. “Traumatization”—its origin and its cure—are then not so much an individual issue, but rather a broader process of society. It is, however, the first of these concepts, PTSD, that is often expected to corroborate a claim of past torture in asylum proceedings—some doctors complain, others approve, most make use of it—, due to the particular linear-causal model on which it is based. And it has become necessary to be invoked, to challenge procedural requirements of asylum procedures. As the lawyer quoted before said: “It is still easy to get a date wrong”. However, locating “(traumatic) memory” within the individual is just one possible problematization inside *and* outside “trauma” discourse.

Although PTSD is a frequent diagnosis in IP reports, one psychologist reflected upon this diagnostic practice in her NGO: a hint towards the institutional “erasures and silences” and the “war inside language” incorporated in the act of naming: “Can one speak of post-traumatic stress, if the stress is still going on?” Also here the reflection outlined by Avelar at the beginning of this chapter is of relevance, when he refers to the political and therapeutic representation of trauma and the imperative not to be complicit with its perpetuation.

## 6. Double alliances and heterogeneous voices

NGO-networks argued for the importance of identifying victim-survivors of past persecution in order to guarantee their rights of access to proper treatment and to contribute to the fact finding process in the asylum procedure based on increased and more professional information. They also lobbied to guarantee a legal status of recognition and form of international protection to victim-survivor of torture (Care Full, 2007, Bruin, Reneman & Bloemen, 2006; IRCT, 2007; Parcours d'Exil, 2008) and to implement the Istanbul Protocol in the identification of torture victims. Simultaneous to this public lobby, the application of the IP and the trauma discourse has also been more or less silently opposed or questioned by some NGOs or single professionals. Some speak about a “prostitution of the discipline” or highlight their conflicting position.

We professionals are in a dilemma: if you write a report you participate in this procedure, if you don't write it you leave the person even more abandoned. It is complicated.

It is all so... hard. Because, the [application of the] Istanbul Protocol [to asylum proceedings], was born out of response to a situation in Europe that is deeply traumatizing. The Istanbul Protocol was born out of the necessity to overcome an adversity [...]. I am not saying the Protocol itself, don't get me wrong, it is an instrument more, to convince, to argue, but its existence is a shame. [...]. It is a shame that one has to use medicine or psychiatry to defend a fundamental right that is written down in the Geneva Convention.

Scholars interested in policy and governmentality have studied how regimes of knowledge and expertise are intertwined with the exercise of power, which aims to know and to govern the wealth, health, happiness—the security—of populations, through control, regulation and care. The application of the IP in asylum proceeding thus presents a specific problematization and possible solution to the states' obligation of allocating care and of assigning protection status: promising to provide the certainty with which the law wrestles. But it is also here that expressions such as “salvation” or “condemnation” find their

social and moral grounding. One could say that experts thus enter a kind of “double alliance”, which has been well described by political social scientists Rose and Miller (1992). On the one hand, they ally themselves with political authorities by focusing upon their problems, problematizing new issues and translating political concerns into the vocabulary of their professional discipline. On the other hand, they form alliances with the individuals themselves, translating their daily worries and decisions in a language claiming the power of truth, and teaching them some useful techniques for their conduct (1992, p. 19). The CEAS policy development process through which victim-survivors of torture gained categorical visibility as “vulnerable persons with special needs” due to trauma shows this double alliance. As do to the dilemmas with which I opened up this chapter. However double alliance has entangled NGOs with governmental practices (on anthropological studies of the state, cf. Das & Poole, 2004; Sharma & Gupta, 2006). The following description by a psychotherapist—who worked exclusively in therapy, but for an NGO that also produced medico-legal reports—permits us to grasp on a phenomenological level as lived experience the dilemmas that may arise when linking identification of victim-survivors of torture for therapeutic and for legal purposes. In an interview occasion this psychotherapist explained to me:

Some people come in, are looking at your files, and wondering: are you in reality part of the “Justice department”? Like, will you have a say in whether they get ... [international protection]? There might be that suspicion around who you really are, what you are going to document about them. And where are you going to document it.

The relationship between NGOs and governments in regard to medical or psychological reports and training for government interviewers constitutes a conflicting issue among the providers of expert knowledge, mostly being NGOs offering psychosocial and medical care to victim-survivors of violence (Bittenbinder, 2006). Conflicting positions relate to the ambiguity of what I called the “alliance”, as well as to the way that NGOs and single professionals understand and treat “trauma” in their clinical practices. Notably, the psychiatrist who spoke about a “situation in Europe that is deeply trauma-

tizing” put the socio- and political context of “trauma” centre-stage. The origin and the cure of this “traumatization” are then not so much individual but part of social processes, localized not in far-away countries of persecution, but within Europe.

## 7. Conclusion

My aim has been to see how the “global fight against torture” through documentation plays out in asylum procedures, whereby I paid special attention to the figure of the expert and to understandings of “trauma”, as they try to translate intimate experiences to make them recognizable by public institutions. As we saw, it is important not only to look at the documents themselves but consider their “making” as social and cultural practice within a specific historical context, which shapes their epistemological categories and their meanings. Documents are artefacts of institutions (Riles, 2006) and of particular importance in asylum applications and for law practice that seeks certainty. Today applicants need to be “backed by papers” (Yngvesson & Coutin, 2006) to satisfy a certain culture of disbelief that questions an asylum seekers identity and account of the past: “are you really who you say” and “did this really happen to you” (Bohmer & Shuman, 2007). Not only has “the militant doctor” (or compassionate doctor) been turned into an “expert of forensic medicine” through increasingly standardized text making (Fassin & d’Halluin, 2005). The Istanbul Protocol, born out of the need to produce knowledge in order to hold state perpetrators accountable, has acquired new and multiple meanings within the asylum procedure, where it is part of the governmental system aimed at making migration flows manageable and different entitlements differentiable. David Mosse remarks: “[u]ltimately, however, institutions or technologies (national or local) fashioned by expert techniques come to be re-embedded in relations of power that alter their functionality [...]” (Mosse, 2011, p. 5).

How can one do justice, when justice—and the “Justice” (tribunal) quoted before—in the historical realm of the law, demands words and visible signs,

rejects silences or so-called “incoherent” testimonies? When torture is officially denied, silenced, and when testimonies are doubted? Wilson argues that most anthropological studies have concentrated on the relationship between violence and the dialectical unmaking and remaking of life worlds. He calls indeed for more ethnographic studies on how testimonies of violence are conditioned by existing forms for speaking about political violence, since they both constrain and elicit testimony. Anthropological theory can help to understand these processes and “politics of truth-telling” (Wilson, 2003, p. 269), which are conditioned by the institutional landscape in which the naming of violence takes place. As my analysis aimed to highlight, these landscapes of meaning and power are characterized by particular modes of discourse and practices, but also by erasures and silences in the translation and recognition of violence. Violence today is frequently formulated in terms of a human rights violation and and (public) health problem (Richters, 2004; Hastrup, 2003). “Trauma” has become a keyword through with various disciplines approach the experience of violence and its aftermath (Kirmayer et al., 2007) and a defining concept as well as resource for recognizing victimhood (Fassin & Rechtman, 2007). However, as Kelly (2012, p. 5) points out, “although the legal category of torture appears to prioritize individual suffering and cruelty, the turn to law can make it very difficult to recognize specific survivors and perpetrators”. A look into national asylum determination decisions shows (Weissensteiner, 2009): applicants were deemed credible if they had significant scars to show and a medico-legal certificate to corroborate their claim, applicants deemed incredible in the absence of scars without taking into account the existence of clean torture techniques, applicants dismissed as incredible in the absence of medical or psychological expert documentation. Here, medico-legal or psychological evidence has gained importance not so much to assess the claim with respect to protection needs, but to ascertain the overall credibility of the applicant.

What sort of “ability to respond”—responsibility—does a testimony of violence demand from those who witness it? Giving the pain a name, naming the violence, and designing a cause, all signifies locating responsibility and reintroducing suffering in a system of shared language and meaning (Good,

1994). But struggling over a name, according to Veena Das, also reflects serious political as well as legal struggles. She argues that “I am in pain” is not an indicative statement, but a claim on the other for acknowledgement, which transforms the task of epistemological recognition into one of ethical acknowledgement (Das, 2007, p. 40, 57). “The victim’s greatest certainty, his pain, is paradoxically also the magistrate’s locus of doubt. Pain stops at the skin’s limit. It is not shareable” (Daniel, 1994, p. 234). Those who are deemed able to translate this experience and make it recognizable to public institutions are then experts. The interview excerpts I quoted at the beginning highlight that for witnesses, documenting torture and trauma involves problems that are ethical, but also epistemological. But they are also legal and political, since a diagnosis of health is taken in politically charged environments.

As Mosse (2011) highlights, focusing on experts and individual actions is frequently read as a negative evaluation. In order to avoid being misunderstood, I want to make explicit that the question here has not been whether “medicalization” of torture and of the asylum procedure could be critiqued on good grounds or, as argued by Wenzel and Kjaer, should be considered as justified for a variety of reasons (Wenzel & Kjaer, 2006, p. 114). Indeed, I explored the conditions that have rendered these knowledge practices possible—and perceived to be necessary—and possible implications of this practice, thereby exploring professional dilemmas as well as the political and the legal domains in which health explanations are addressed with the aim of rendering violence recognizable. My aim has not been to evaluate this practice, but to take the thoughts, concerns and experiences of professionals seriously and to situate their testimonies and practices within the broader context in which they are embedded. Nor is this a claim to substitute or downplay knowledge from other disciplinary fields such as law or medicine. Anthropological theory and ethnographic research can help to explore how the “global fight against torture” becomes real within the conditions of local landscapes. Experts find themselves in a difficult role: while it is nearly impossible to be certain whether or not an individual has been tortured (Peel, 1998)—due to the fact that some forms of torture don’t leave any scars

and most scarring could tell potentially different stories—medical knowledge has nevertheless played an important role in rendering some aspects of violence visible and recognizable by public institutions. However, in the context of migration management these documents acquire new meanings. But there remains a level of uncertainty, especially in asylum proceedings, which needs to be recognized. And there are dimensions of “trauma” silenced by a single post-traumatic-stress discourse. The primary problem is not the participation of experts and organizations that “are trying to rectify today’s fundamentally unfair system” (Haagensen, 2007), but the emergence of a system or apparatus that can produce painful effects without breaking skins.

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